

Misplacing Seiner's Point

Batty Doe Lake - Mackinac County



Batty Doe Lake. Photo Courtesy of The Nature Conservancy/Alisa Hummell

Batty Doe Lake, Mackinac County - Michigan I didn't actually misplace Seiner's Point - I did the opposite of finding it. But what do you call that? Misplacing is more apt than losing, but neither word suggests the truth; I never had it at all.

According to the maps – both the shiny new one and the ancient one – to find Seiner's Point, you drive to Batty Doe Lake and from there hike Lake Michigan's shoreline to Seiner's Point. Getting to Batty Doe Lake looks fairly straight forward; take Quarry Road until it dead ends to Batty Doe Lake Road, which leads to its namesake lake. Looking at the maps, Seiner's Point looks very accessible, but I know it might not be as easy as the maps suggest.

Seiner's Point Complex is a linear arrangement of natural communities, including wooded dune and swale, interdunal wetlands, open dunes and limestone cobble shore, along the Lake Michigan coast in southwest Mackinac County. Seiner's Point is rare, and not just because it's difficult to find. The interdunal swales are some of the longest known, and there are less than 50 good example of this rare community anywhere else. It's one of the longest stretches of Lake Michigan shoreline not bound by structures or road. The Steiner's Point Complex is owned by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and is considered an Ecological Reference Area.

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The area is home to characteristic and significant features of a northern Great Lakes shoreline – a cobble beach, Great Lakes endemic plants and rare shorebirds. Visitors to Seiner's Point can discover scenic vistas, rare birds and unhampered wildflower growth – if they can find it.

When I head out to find Seiner's Point, it's a beautiful day. The sun is shining and the temperature is unseasonably warm for November, at least 50 degrees. Not finding Seiner's Point is a possibility, at least for me. But it seems like both the sky above and the trees around are calling on me – how can I fail?

As the maps promised, after passing a huge quarry and turning off Quarry Road, Batty Doe Lake Road sits. After about seven miles of one-lane dirt, I'm surprised by a fork in the road. Neither option is marked. I go right five miles or so one direction, backtrack, and go the other direction. There, I reach another fork. For every clear path, there's another option.

After hitting all the well-beaten paths, I decide to heed Robert Frost and take the one less traveled. It leads to a mud pit that I'm sure I'll never make it through, so I bail on that one. But the second, less-worn path I backtrack to opens to a small clearing, and there, in all its glory, is Batty Doe Lake. The water is clear and beautiful, and the area looks untouched except for a sign that reads:

SAFETY NOTICE
NEARBY CABINS
WITH PEOPLE.
PLEASE NO RIFLE SHOOTING IN CAMPGROUND OR ON LAKE.

But there's not a cabin in sight. I blaze a bit of trail, looking for the elusive path to Seiner's Point. Where the roads to Batty Doe Lake offered some hope of discovery, Seiner's Point seems like a dream – only muck and dense forest from where I stand.



Google's Path to Seiner's Point. Photo Courtesy of The Nature Conservancy/Alisa Hummell

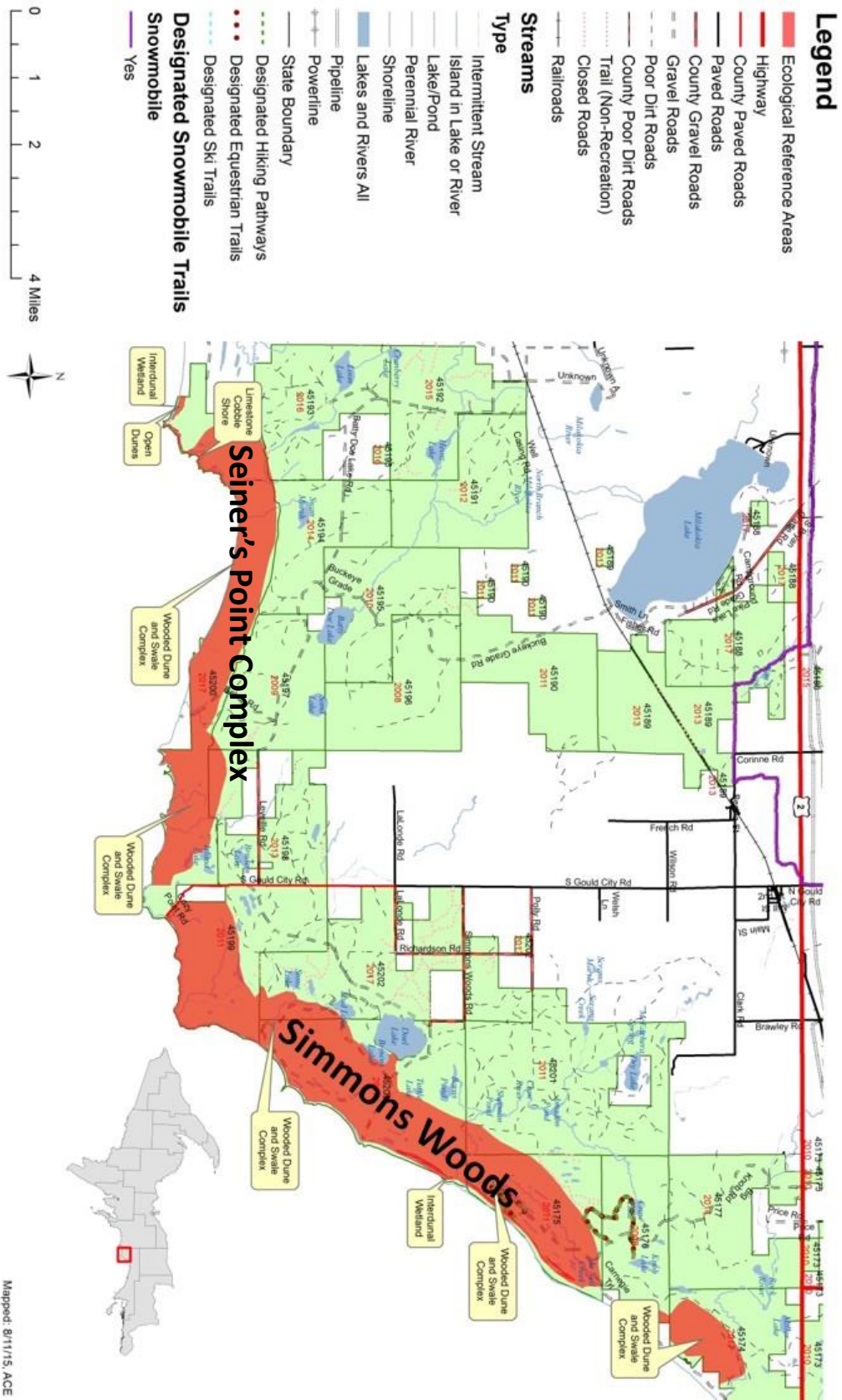
Because of the twists and turns, I'm confused about exactly where I am on the lake. I check my phone for a compass and see a signal, which comes in and out. As a last ditch hope, I map my location to Seiner's Point. And with a wave of the technological wand, there it is.

Marked with a blue line is a clear path, 1.6 miles from where I stand. I skip along – happy to think that I've managed the impossible. The blue line ends, and my phone says, "Your destination is on the right."

I look to my right, but there's only dense forest. To my left is an old "No Trespassing" sign. Google seems as stumped as I am, but it's a lot surer of itself. It's 3:00-ish, and in two hours, dark will be on its way. I've been warned to flag the trees when I walk through the forest, but it's a straight shot. How lost could I get?

Thankfully, only 20 minutes' worth. I venture into the forest where Google seems to think Seiner's Point is, carefully stepping to prevent disruption. I find a clearing, but beyond it, more forest. When I turn around, sure of my way back to the road, all my mental path markers are there, but multiplied. Apparently, bent trees and stick-ground cover aren't the best land markers. I wander a bit, and after a few moments of panic, eventually make it back to Batty Doe Lake Road.

If I were to drive down Batty Doe Lake Road in search of the lake today, it's just as likely I would miss it entirely, even after finding it the first time. Such elusiveness makes it special, but it also protects the area. Great Lakes endemic plants and rare shorebirds thrive in Seiner's Point, at least in part because I can't find it. It's one of the few examples of the Great Lakes shoreline that is mostly the same as it was when the Europeans found it. I wish I'd seen it – but it's doing fine without me.



More Information

http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-31154_31260-54400--,00.html

http://www.midnr.com/Publications/pdfs/ForestsLandWater/Cmpt_Reviews/Sault_Ste_Marie/2018/Seiners_Point_ERA_Plan_Draft.pdf