

# Keeping the customers talking is their job

◆ **Phone service:** These Fairpoint technicians are charged with maintaining landlines to the islands in Lake Winnepesaukee.

By **PAULA TRACY**  
New Hampshire Union Leader

**GILFORD** — Lake Winnepesaukee has more than 80 islands with landline phone service connecting them to the mainland.

It makes for a unique service area for Fairpoint Service Technicians Jeff Kruger and Clint Moulton.

On days when they have island calls, the men leave their bucket trucks at the dock at Fay's Boat Yard, and climb aboard a 22-foot Pen Yan with bags of equipment — and their lunch — for the day's work.

On Tuesday, they motored out of the harbor to rehabilitate four 1980s-era interface boxes on Sandy Island for the YMCA summer camp. They also had to handle a downed line on Mark Island.

"Sometimes its just hard to find the house," said Moulton, as the small vessel passed Jolly Island in a light rain. "The numbers aren't easy to see, and some people don't have them at all."

"It's fun just seeing some of the old camps," Kruger said.

Fairpoint counts about 1,000 island customers on the Big Lake. There also is service to islands on Squam Lake, Newfound and Sunapee. Many of the lines come from the mainland and run under the water.



Rather than use a bucket truck, Clint Moulton of Fairpoint begins to climb a telephone pole on Lake Winnepesaukee's Mark Island on Tuesday with partner Jeff Kruger assisting. The two have a unique job maintaining landline service on more than 80 islands on the Big Lake.

PAULA TRACY

If the islands are big enough, there are poles which need to be serviced. Now customers can get DSL service on most of the islands where there is existing service.

When comparing it to service work on the mainland, "It's a lot more physical," Moulton

acknowledged. Rather than just driving to a downed line and using an aerial bucket truck to reach the lines, the two carry their heavy equipment up from the boat, across the often steep and rocky islands, to find the problems. Then they need to climb poles

with spikes on their shoes and straps around their waists as the 40-foot poles sway about. The toughest island to serve, they said, is Ragged Island, because it is so steep.

Tropical Storm Irene did some damage, particularly on Sleeper Island, but not as much as other storms over the years.

At Mark Island, the two have to look around awhile to find the downed line.

They pull up to one dock, tie up and began to search for the downed line.

At this time of year, the lake is quiet and few people seem to be around. In this case, there are no people around at all. They see a few deer, who offer no help and scamper off, white tails in the air.

The two find the telephone poles on the center of the island and follow them a distance to find the down wires.

After the reconnaissance, they return to the boat and

move it down to another, closer dock where they again tie up and begin to haul the equipment in bags or strapped around their waists.

They first need to be sure that the pole has not gone rotten or is damaged, and that it is not electrified.

Moulton uses hooks strapped to his boots and climbs the 1986 NH Electric Co-op pole, with Kruger helping from the ground. As he goes up higher, the pole begins to sway.

Moulton improvises a bit because they do not have a "come-along" — a needed tool on the boat.

But they manage to get the line back up on the pole safely and off the ground.

Fairpoint requires the men to work as a team on the islands. If one had a problem and needed help, it could take a long time to get them help and having backup personnel provides peace of mind.

Kruger has worked 22 years on the job and for Moulton, it has been about 10, and while not every day requires a service call to the lake, both men seem to enjoy the time out on the water.

Kruger said he enjoys this time of year the most when the leaves are changing and the days are still warm and it is quiet.

The team will keep the boat at the ready in dry dock until about mid December.

Around Memorial Day weekend is when island summer residents return to find what has happened on the island during the winter and if there is no dial tone, it usually leads to a visit by Kruger and Moulton.

The few full-time island residents who need help in the middle of the winter can get service by snowmobile, but Moulton admits it is a tricky proposition come spring thaw.