

Cruising

Lake Superior's **North Shore**

By Mike Gridley

Challenging waters, desolate shores, unique communities

Lake Superior is a vast inland sea that almost overwhelms you at first sight, whether flying over the pristine, cold waters or looking across its expanse from the sheer rock cliffs reaching up to the sky along the north shore. Gazing out from a lookout on St. Ignace Island this summer, I could actually see the curvature of the earth on the distant horizon, where blue sky met blue water.

The lake's rugged and breathtaking beauty, along with her history, is etched in the Canadian soul through its physical presence, writings and magnificent art. The jagged cliffs, smooth shoals and islands, as well as the "Lake Superior Beaches" comprised of pebbles to large round stones, tell a tale of volcanoes, the ice age and vast riches.

The oldest fossils found anywhere have been found in the rocks along Whitefish River, while volcanic action has created one of the finest pebble beaches in the world in Agawa Bay. Rich mineral deposits, from iron ore to copper and gold, have been mined on her shores. In fact, silver was taken from beneath the lake in the appropriately named Silver Islet.

Largest of the five Great Lakes, Superior is bounded on the north shore by Ontario and Minnesota and to the south by Wisconsin and Michigan. It is the largest freshwater lake in the world by surface area, covering some 82,413 square kilometres. The lake is 350 miles long and 160 miles across at its widest point, with an average depth of 482 feet and a maximum depth of 1,332 feet.

When factoring in the islands, Superior's shoreline stretches 2,726 miles.

The Ojibwa call the lake Gichigami, which means "big water." Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote the name as "Gitche Gumee" in *The Song of Hiawatha*, as did Gordon Lightfoot in his song, "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald." The first French explorers approaching the great inland sea by way of the Ottawa River and Lake Huron during the 17th century referred to their discovery as le lac Supérieur or "Upper Lake." The lake was also called Lac Tracy by 17th century Jesuit missionaries. When the English took control of the region from the French in the 1760s following the French and Indian War they anglicized the lake's name to Superior, which they felt was appropriate due to its size.

A Bit of History

The Lake Superior region was first populated 10,000 years ago after the last Ice Age. Successive peoples occupied the shores, including the Shield Archaic, who are believed to be the ancestors of the Ojibwa and Cree. They travelled and traded along the Canadian shoreline with dugout canoes, fished and hunted with bows and arrows, and mined copper for tools and weapons.

The Laurel people developed seine net fishing leaving behind traces of their activities in rivers such as the Michipicoten River. They were followed by the Algonkian people who hunted, fished and gathered berries and used snowshoes, birch bark canoes and conical or domed lodges. The Anishinaabe, also known as the Ojibwa or Chippewa, have inhabited the Lake Superior region for over 500 years. They were preceded by the Dakota, Fox, Menominee, Nipigon, Noquet and Gros Ventres. These people called Lake Superior "Anishnaabe Gichigamiing" or "the Ojibwa's Ocean." After the arrival of the Europeans, the Anishinaabe became the middlemen between the French fur traders and other Native peoples.

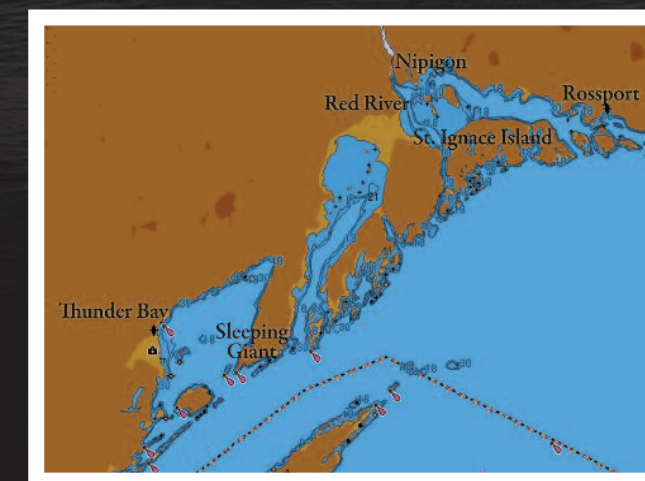
The fur trade in the region was booming in the 18th century. In 1783, the North West Company was formed to rival the virtual monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company. The North West Company built forts on Lake Superior at Grand Portage, Nipigon, the Pic River, the Michipicoten River and Sault Ste. Marie, but competition took a great toll on both companies. In 1821 they merged under the

Hudson's Bay Company name.

Many communities around the lake are either current or former mining and logging towns. Shipping is still in full swing on the lake with lake freighters and oceangoing ships transporting a wide range of cargos including iron ore and grains.

The lake's shipwrecks and lighthouses, rugged shorelines and wilderness, all attract adventurous tourists and cruising boaters, making tourism a significant industry along the Canadian north shore.

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Cruising in Nipigon Bay



Thunder Bay Waterfront Improvements



Welcome Islands Off Thunder Bay

tion of her book. *The Superior Way* is available through most major book retailers.

Thunder Bay & Sleeping Giant

So how does one get hooked on taking a trip north? For me, it was sparked by a casual conversation with Thunder Bay boater Darcy Trist at the Toronto International Boat Show. It was decided almost immediately that the PowerBoat Television crew would head up to film the spectacular north shore of Superior for the 2012 season. With the help of David Van Wagoner of the North of Superior Marine Marketing Association, Cathy Presenger from the City of Thunder Bay and the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation, we were on our way in August.

Greeted warmly upon our arrival, we were immediately taken to the city's waterfront. It had been more than a decade since I had been to the lake head, so the changes made and still actively underway on the shore were startling.

Thunder Bay's history is truly a tale of two cities: Fort William, a trading post established in the 17th century near the mouth of the Kaministiquia River, and Port Arthur, which began as a depot on the shores of the bay for the Canadian Department of Public Works.

With the building of the railway in 1882, the port became a rapidly growing centre for shipping grain, as well as an ongoing forestry giant. When the cities finally amalgamated in 1970, the logical choice for the new name was Thunder Bay, borrowing from the original Indian name for the site – "Animikie," which means "Thunder."

After a long successful run, activities in the commercial harbour eventually declined and several commercial wharfs and grain elevators were abandoned or demolished. This gave the city a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rejuvenate its waterfront by providing a facility for boaters that connects directly with the city and its people.

Joining us on our cruise around the Thunder Bay area was Paul Pepe, acting waterfront development manager, who pointed out all of the highlights of this \$130 million project. Miles of parks and paths and a large, full-service, multi-basin marina now grace the waterfront. This ongoing development makes the city of Thunder Bay a world-class cruising destination. And one not only for recreational boaters, as a dedicated cruise ship pier is also being developed... and has already received its first visitor. The waters of Thunder Bay offer cruising boaters some great destinations within a day's travel. Besides great fishing, number one with local boaters are the Welcome

Islands, located directly off the city's waterfront. Cruising further afield, you can explore the prominent formation of pine covered rock on Sibley Peninsula. The peninsula is mostly occupied by Sleeping Giant Provincial Park, which is accessible from natural anchorages at Sawyer Bay and Tee Harbour. Located on Sibley's tip is Silver Islet, a 19th century mining town where you will find overnight docking available at the government wharf. A stop here affords you the opportunity to stroll through the picturesque village where some of the original cottages have been preserved as private summer residences. While on shore, be sure to enjoy tea and sandwiches in the back room at the old General Store.

From the tip of the Sleeping Giant, you can head east into the Lake Superior Archipelago, probably some of the lake's best cruising areas. This group of islands stretches from the western end of Black Bay to Schreiber.

Red Rock & the Marine Conservation Area

The town of Red Rock, which takes its name from the distinctive layers of rusty red stone visible in the surrounding cliffs, served as our jumping off point to cruise the spectacular wilderness islands of the archipelago. Like many Northern Ontario towns, Red Rock was once a thriving paper mill town. As the mill now sits silent, the community has turned its focus to tourism, with a solid commitment to recreational

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Resources

If you're an adventurer who would relish the opportunity to cruise challenging waters along desolate shores and stop in unique communities, the north shore of Lake Superior, from Whitefish Bay to the Minnesota border, awaits.

There are some good resources available for planning your trip. A great place to start is with the North of Superior Marine Marketing Association, which was founded in 1993 to promote recreational boating on the north shore of Lake Superior. The association's ultimate goal is to work with communities from Sault Ste. Marie to the U.S. border west of Thunder Bay to develop facilities and services for boaters. Their website (lakesuperiorboating.com) has detailed information on all of the communities and marinas to help you plan your cruise.

Another invaluable resource is the "must-have" book, *The Superior Way: A Cruising Guide to Lake Superior*, written by Bonnie Dahl. Bonnie and her husband Don have been cruising Superior for more than 30 years and have explored every inch of the lake's shoreline and its islands. This detailed guide provides boaters with a wealth of knowledge that cannot be found anywhere else; revealing every bay, river outlet and hidey-hole to find safe anchorage in, as well as a list of the services and attractions in each port-of-call. While I was touring parts of the north shore this August, Bonnie and Don were revisiting the area for updates for the fifth edi-

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Flower Pots and Red Beaches

boating. The marina is one of the best on the north shore and boasts a well-protected basin, excellent docks with 30- and 50-amp power, gas, diesel, pump-outs and showers.

A well-equipped playground in the waterfront park provides a pleasant diversion for the junior members of the crew. A grocery store, convenience store, liquor and beer store, and post office, as well as automatic teller banking facilities, are located within easy walking distance from the marina. Boaters are always welcome at the historic Red Rock Inn, which provides shower facilities, accommodations and casual fine dining.

Cruising out from Red Rock, we were joined by some Parks Canada representatives who took us on a tour through the area and talked about



Scenic

their newest project, the establishment of the Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area. Covering 10,850 square kilometres, when formally established it will be the largest protected freshwater area in the world and Canada's fourth marine conservation area.

So what does this mean for boaters? It guarantees the land, islands and waters will be safeguarded and managed for the enjoyment of generations to come. While some islands and land are in private hands and will remain so, the vast majority and all of the water will be protected. As a conservation area (rather than a National Park) fishing and hunting can continue as it has for generations.

Every direction offered a spectacular view as we crossed Nipigon Bay heading for Nipigon Strait, which is bordered on the east by St. Ignace Island, the largest in the archipelago. On the northern tip of St. Ignace is Caribou Cove. Once a commercial fishing camp, cruisers can find shelter here and bask in the warmth of a steam bath maintained by local boaters.

Nipigon

But it was not time to head home just yet. Back in Nipigon Bay, we were headed for the Nipigon River and the town of Nipigon. Just before entering the river, we cruised close to the cliffs on the eastern shore across from Saw Mill Point. Though faded due to erosion, you can still see some of the pictographs painted between 400 and 1,000 years ago.

Following a well-marked channel leading into Nipigon, we arrived at the marina. The main dock is an old wharf that can handle vessels large and small. You also have access to a complete range of services including diesel, gasoline (may be arranged), water, pump-outs, washrooms, showers, overnight camping and a gift shop.

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Paddle to the Sea



Crossing the 49th

On shore, there was a surprise waiting for our crew. Sarah Lewis, the economic development officer for the town, presented us with certificates and T-shirts recognizing our distinction of having boated to the northernmost freshwater port, having just crossed the 49th parallel.

Known as the "Crossroads of Canada," the heritage of this community is depicted in a series of murals that grace the downtown streets, where you will find everything from groceries, beer and liquor, to hardware, clothing and gifts, as well as accommodations and restaurants within walking distance of the harbour. Nipigon also has a bank, post office, convenience store, library (with internet access) and marine dealer.



Longcroft Island

A new attraction is a tribute to Holling C. Holling's *Paddle to the Sea*, a children's book about a Native boy on Lake Nipigon who carves an Indian in a Canoe and launches it to paddle the Great Lakes and out the St. Lawrence to the sea. Starting in the park adjacent to the town offices and library, a series of stations depicting the story has been installed all the way back to the waterfront.

The Islands

Departing Nipigon, Gary Bowman of Bowman Charters and Lodge took us to explore the outer side of St. Ignace Island, following the most popular cruising route through the Nipigon Strait and past Longcroft, Angelica and Talbot islands. Words cannot describe the rugged beauty of these islands.

Once through the strait and out in the open waters of Lake Superior, we looked back at the islands that guard the mainland. It was at this point that it struck me what a privilege it was to be able to cruise this area. The trip would definitely provide me with memories to last a lifetime.

From Talbot, we doubled back and headed for what the locals call CPR Bay on St. Ignace. During the building of the railway, a port was established to transfer gravel needed for rail beds and concrete being mined at the islands onto trains. Today, the protected harbour is owned by a prominent Thunder Bay family who has decreed the docks, land and building remain accessible to all boaters. This makes CPR a popular destination for boaters looking to get ashore, gather indoors with fellow boaters or have a steam bath.

Energetic boaters can also opt to hike up to the lookout. Despite carrying a ton of TV camera gear, we decided to do just that. The trail passes through prime undisturbed forest then heads up the rocks, where several sections have ropes to help hikers climb up and repel down. At the top, the adventurous are rewarded

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View from St. Ignace



Rosspport Marina



Nice Kitty

with a bench for a well-deserved rest and a priceless view out over the sparkling waters and islands. Once we caught our breath, we signed the guest book and started our return trek to the water.

Back on board, Gary showed us some more of the great bays and anchorages tucked into the islands where cruising boats can stop, throw a hook and relax or wait out wind and weather before tackling the next leg.

We ended the day at Gary's lodge on Bowman Island for a great evening ashore that included cold beverages, tasty grilled lake trout, a traditional Finnish steam bath and a dunk in the cold waters of Lake Superior.

For our last day, we were headed for the community of Rosspport, located at the top of the Schreiber Channel. Before we reached our destination we were in for a surprise. As we cruised between two islands, we spotted something swimming in the water. Moving in for a closer look, we discovered it was a cat swimming from one island to the next. But this was no domestic cat – it was a full-grown lynx. Naturally, we decided to idle the boat to capture this rare treat on film. Well, I suppose the lynx figured we were a heck of a lot closer than land, as it swam over to our trawler and,

with one outstretched paw (with very large claws), pulled itself aboard for a rest. How fast do you think four guys can clear the decks and beat it into a cabin? When things calmed down, we were able to prod the cat off the boat closer to its destination.

Rosspport

With our stowaway off the boat, we continued our cruise into Rosspport. Always a popular spot for cruising boaters, you may share the dock as we did with sailboats from Michigan and a cruiser from Midland, Ont., on Georgian Bay or pass a cruise ship at anchor. Gasoline, diesel, pump-out, and electricity are available at the dock. Whether you tie up or anchor in the bay, this former commercial fishing port features charming gift shops and excellent restaurants for a night out.

A short walk up the hill in this quaint village will bring you to the Serendipity Gardens Café and Gallery, which serves a feast for the eyes as well as the tastebuds. Accommodations are available at the Willows Inn Bed and

Breakfast, Serendipity Guest House, and Island Shores Bed and Breakfast. For the shopper's delight, there are Forget-Me-Not Gift Shop and Shipwrecks Gifts and Collectibles.

From here, we joined Paul Turpin of Discovery Charters to cruise the Rosspport Islands. Heading out into more open waters brought us to Battle Island Lighthouse, one of the wonderful lighthouses that still guide ships along Lake Superior's rugged north shore. Although a light rain settled in, we stayed out for several hours, exploring the islands, looking from a distance and from two feet off a cliff in 300 feet of water. Paul was able to show us a range of anchorages and campsites to suit any boater looking to explore these protected waters, camp or anchor for a while, and try their hand chasing the local fish. As we wove through the islands, I marvelled at the geology that has formed this wonderful rock and pine garden on Lake Superior's north shore.

If you are a long-distance cruiser, exploring the North Shore of Lake Superior most definitely should be on your bucket list. I know it's on mine. And if you can trailer your boat, you will probably beat me there. But don't forget, there are several charter companies and lodges that will take you exploring and look after all your needs if you want to fly to Thunder Bay or drive scenic Highway 17 to experience Superior. 🚤



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