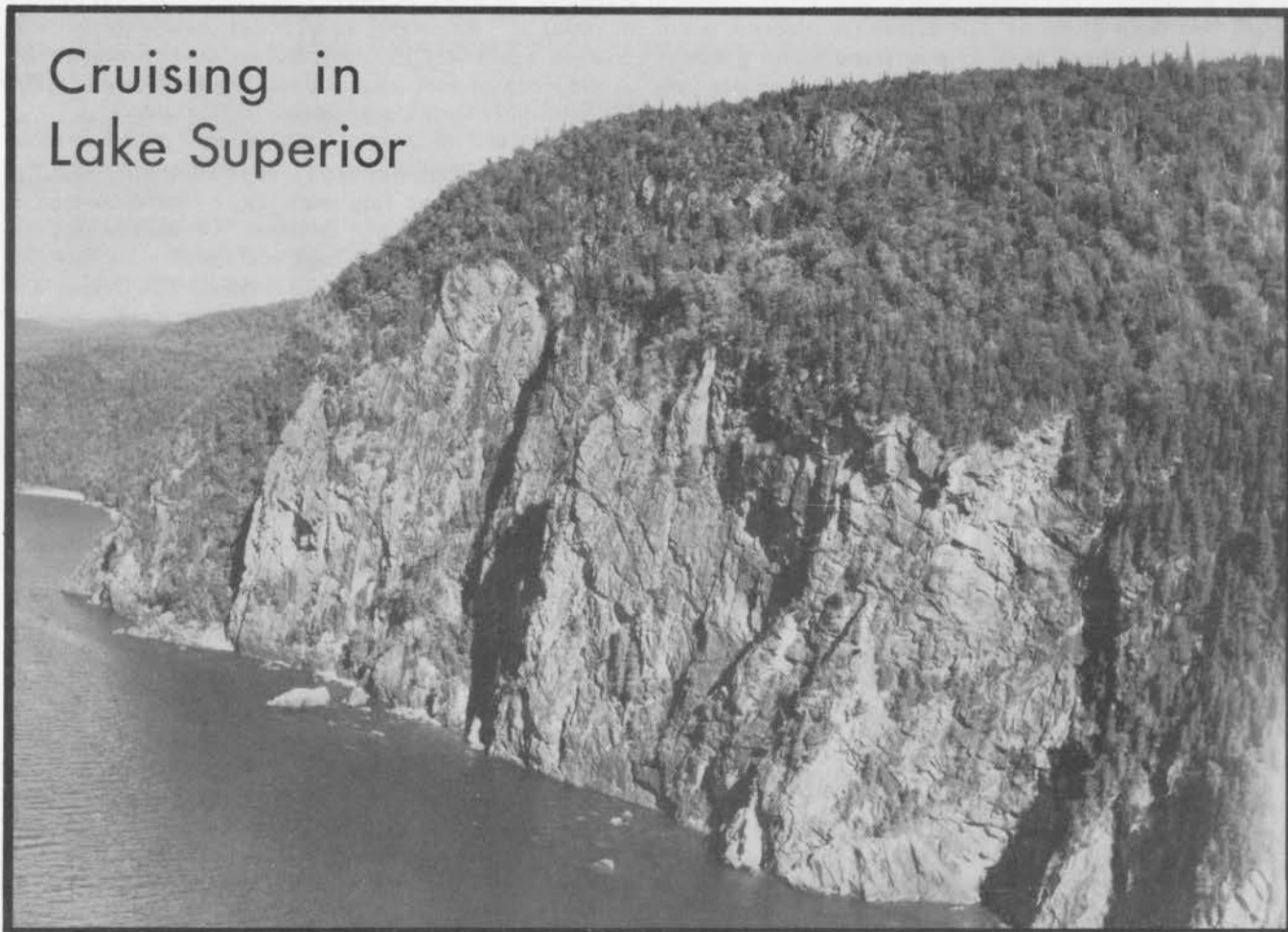


Cruising in Lake Superior



Aerial Photo by Ontario Forestry Dept.

This view is of Cap Chaillon, 7 miles north of Cape Gargantua.

AN INTRODUCTION TO LAKE SUPERIOR

This, the greatest of the world's unsalted seas, has been immortalized by Longfellow as the Gitchee Gumee of the Hiawatha romance, the shining Big-Sea-Water. Its praises have been sung by yachtsmen and fishermen for years.

Fervent as have been the praises, so have been the curses laid on it since the early days of the Indian medicine man, down to many a hapless sailor of our day who has challenged Superior's boldness with a recklessness which could bring nothing but mishaps, and sometimes tragedy.

It is the purpose of this introduction to Lake Superior to present her beauties to yachtsmen, yet offer the cautions which must be observed to catch and note the siren lure which may lie beneath her beauteous smile, and lead a careless yachtsman into trouble.

The information in this introduction has been drawn from such sources as the U.S. Lake Survey Bulletin; the Geographical Bulletin of the Department of Mines and Technical Surveys; Rear Commodore Colin MacMillan of the Great Lakes Cruising Club for Lake Superior; and Jack McKay, L. A. Ferguson, Dr. Leland E. Holly and a score of other members of the Great Lakes Cruising Club who have added a note here and there to round out a report, or who gave a tip on how best to enjoy this area.

Some geographical notes: Lake Superior is indeed the superior of the five Great Lakes. Its greatest overall length has been given as 412 miles; its greatest width (at about 86° 45' West) as 60 miles, nearly three times the widths of either Lakes Erie or Ontario; its greatest surveyed depth is 1,290 feet; but its average mean rainfall is the least of the Great Lakes, 28 inches per year...and make of that what you will! It discharges 70,700 cubic feet per second into the St. Mary's river. It is about 22 feet higher than Lake Huron.

In comparing Superior with the other Great Lakes the Lakes Survey Bulletin says "it is more elevated than the sea, it is more irregular in outline, has deeper and colder water, more fog, more ice, a shorter season of navigation, less rain, about the same snowfall, and winds and seas not greatly different." Added to this the Canadian Geographical Bulletin warns mariners to be on the watch for floating logs and deadheads that are encountered in great numbers from pulpwood rafts. In connection with that phrase "Lake Superior has deeper and colder water" than any of the other Great Lakes, Commodore MacMillan advises cruisers to follow more carefully than they normally might, cautions against "Man Overboard!" He writes: "The temperature of the water, even in summer, is such that should a man go overboard, unless he is IMMEDIATELY WITHIN A MATTER OF MINUTES recovered, he will suffer at least from a severe case of exposure or perish from the cold. Get an adequate lifering to him at once, since in moments he will be so chilled he can do little to help himself, and then maneuver to pick him up."

To the casual observer Superior's east coast seems most inhospitable, seemingly made up of nothing but mile after mile of sheer, frowning, towering boldness, sternly rebuffing the questing yachtsman seeking a night's shelter. Typical of that impression is the photograph at the head of this introduction. Actually this is not the fact.

Scores of small, secure, and identifiable harbors can be found along this shore, and these are considered in individual harbor reports which follow. The Canadian Government, local yachtsmen, and commercial sailors are gradually setting up aids to navigation.

One point of caution must be constantly borne in mind; local magnetic disturbances of the compass needle is more prevalent on Superior than on the other lakes, and this appears to be particularly true along the North shore. Changes in local attraction from 26° to 7° within a space of less than a thousand feet have been noted by surveying vessels. Virtually all noted variations have been East. It is these variations which make it most unwise to attempt any navigation by compass alone during fogs, when visible marks or identifiable portions of the coastline are obscured. Radio direction finders have proved most effective under these conditions.

Safe harbors are much more frequent along the East shore than a hasty study of the charts would indicate. Colin MacMillan, Rear Commodore of the Great Lakes Cruising Club in Superior, reports that "in one or two instances there is a gap between harbors of over 30 miles, but in most sections it is seldom more than 10 miles. All these little harbors offer complete protection, and one can rest comfortably no matter what is happening on the open lake."

If your craft is the sailing type, Commodore MacMillan adds, it should be equipped with a good auxiliary motor, with which to negotiate the harbors. Be sure that you have the latest charts in addition to the Cruising Club reports. Although it is true there are few detailed charts for small boat harbors, the existing charts are accurate, and most small harbors, coves, and bays where pleasure craft can find shelter are for the most part clearly indicated, if not named or charted in detail.

Commodore MacMillan reports that there are more than 100 harbors of refuge where small craft can find excellent shelter between Sault Ste. Marie and Duluth, going North and then West. At no fewer than 16 of these harbors, fuel and supplies can be obtained, and these supply harbors are spaced so that one need not make a run, at most, of more than 100 miles between fuel and supply points.

Fog is always a major source of worry to boatmen, but on the whole, it is not a great deal worse than on the other lakes, save for a section extending from the White Mud River to Rossport, a section classed as semi-arctic. In this area fog is extremely bad during June, sometimes extending into July, and may be compared with conditions found on the Grand Banks off Newfoundland. This fog can spring up around a cruiser in a matter of minutes. Commodore MacMillan reports that local boatmen have a wholesome respect for this particular type of June fog and do their cruising fairly close to shore so that at the first hint of fog they can duck into a shelter to wait it out.

The predominating strong winds on Superior are southwest to northwest. This fact has a bearing on the interpretation of weather reports which may be received aboard a vessel. A hot high pressure area can be reported moving in from the West. Forecasts based on this pressure area can hold true for the West coast and a part of the

North coast, but by the time this warm air has passed over 300 miles of cold water the weather which you get, for instance, off Otter Island, is entirely different from that forecast. This cooling of the air tends to reduce the likelihood of severe line squalls, the bugbear of most amateur yachtsmen.

For example, the Commodore reports that for the 6 years before the compilation of this report (1953) covering a period from May to late October, he has cruised continuously on the East coast and in that time encountered only one line squall which would be a cause of worry to any well found small boat.

"On the whole", he writes, "we who cruise Lake Superior's East and North shores consider the weather excellent for boating from mid-May until mid-September, except for the June fog period. And June is a good month to cruise, if one has the patience to sit out a few days of fog in some snug harbor."

Contrary to information supplied in the Sailing Directions, for the Canadian North shore, there are comparatively few Indians now living along this shore. They are now mostly centered in such places as Batchawana Bay, Michipicoten Harbor, Pic River, Port Caldwell, Pays Plat Bay, Nipigon, Fort William, and on reservations. It has been the experience of veteran cruisers in this area that it is wise not to give encouragement to the average Indian, since once on board they cling like barnacles and are difficult to get off, and their information is not always reliable since most of their experience has been canoe travel. The white population, on the other hand, seems well grounded in information and is only too glad to help.

Don't forget a comprehensive supply of spare parts, fuel and food such as you would ordinarily take to any out-of-the-way cruising area. Then the venturing yachtsman can enjoy the beauties of Superior cruising with the secure knowledge that he has taken every sensible precaution to make his cruise a venture and not an adventure. A good seaworthy dinghy with an outboard motor of at least 10 horsepower is invaluable for fishing and exploring.

After leaving Sault Ste. Marie the yachtsman will find considerable signs of habitation as far north as Montreal River. In recent years a good gravel highway has been pushed north along the shore to a point a few miles north of Montreal River. From this point north to Michipicoten Harbor the only habitation is Gargantua Harbor. At Michipicoten Harbor, gasoline, ice, and groceries are available. This is an interesting village at rail's end. Large amounts of iron ore are shipped from this point. It is the port of entry for coal and gasoline, brought in by lake freighters. A few miles inland from Michipicoten Harbor is the mining town of Wawa. There is no highway connecting the two towns. Wawa can be reached by rail from Michipicoten Harbor, or by boat one can go up the Michipicoten River to the turning basin, junction of the Magpie and Michipicoten Rivers, from which point a highway extends three miles to Wawa and then to Hawk Junction. The latter is on the main line of the Algoma Central railroad. Wawa has a population of about 2,500 where doctors, a hospital and hotel accommodations may be found.

From Michipicoten Harbor west and then north of Marathon, a distance of 120 miles, is a section of almost primeval shore, with many fine small shelter harbors. There is a lack of established aids of navigation, there being only one lighthouse between these two points, that at Otter Island.

Years ago the Uihleins of Milwaukee, cruising in the schooner Atlantic, marked a few of the harbors with white inverted cones or large white crosses. In 1952 and 1953 the Canadian Government set up additional markers. These will be dealt with in the individual harbor reports. This shore is quite rugged and unless one is cruising close to shore it is easy to pass a sought-for harbor.

Marathon is a pulp mill town of about 2,000 population...a fully modern town, boasting a heated swimming pool! All types of supplies and services are available, including a repair yard for boats, dry cleaning, a theatre, laundry, tennis court and golf courses.

Port Caldwell, Jackfish, Terrace Bay (with facilities rivalling those of Marathon), Nipigon, Port Arthur and Fort William follow in sequence as the yachtsman moves westward to the International Boundary at Pigeon River. From Pigeon River to Duluth, a distance of about 150 miles, the shore is beautiful and rugged but has only two good harbors, one at Grand Marais and the other at Two Harbors, both with excellent services available.

Some Notes on Fishing in Lake Superior

By Rear Commodore Colin MacMillan and Dr. Leland Holly.

These notes are not intended as a fishing guide to tell visitors in just which bay, river, or around which island, this or that fish can be caught. Much of the fun of fishing is the searching for and discovery of a spot where they are hitting. I intend in these notes only to tell visitors in general where fishing should be good, and what sort of fish to expect.

Fishermen have heard the fabulous tales of catches in Superior. But you just don't throw out a line anywhere in the lakes and expect to hook something. Different waters, different techniques.

LAKE TROUT: There are several species in Superior, all good eating, except for what is known locally as Fats. Smoked, Fats are all right. If you're not sure your catch is one of Fats, put a fillet in the frying pan. If the pan fills with oil and the fillet shrinks to a miniature lamb chop, it's a Fat. Throw the whole mess to the gulls. Fats are caught at great depths when you are trolling, 400 to 600 feet.

Do your trolling in water from 100 to 300 feet deep. Have some 600 to 900 feet of copper, monel, or stainless steel line on your reel to take the line to the bottom. If you do not use metal line you need weights. Run the boat VERY slowly over the bank or shoal with up to 300 feet of water over it. If more than one is fishing, everyone should reel in as soon as one makes a strike. Your catch will run from 4 to 12 pounds, but up to 40 pounds have been taken. So set yourself comfortably and securely for a long fight.

You can troll quite close to shore if the sun is high, so that the rocks may be spotted by the helmsman. A pair of Polaroid glasses will be of great help in conning the waters. When the water turns lighter green than the surrounding waters, sheer off. It's a rock. Fish so close that your bait lands within a foot or two of the shore rocks. Those shore dwelling fish put up a much better fight than the deep water trout and can best be fished with light tackle fly rod, spinning, etc.

Lake trout can be fished from early spring to late fall. The first few weeks, generally, the trout will be found close to shore, at the mouths of rivers, in waters as shallow as one fathom. After this early period the trout go out to deeper water. to return about the middle of August or the first of September, for spawning. The small lake trout hug the shores through the summer.

SPECKLED TROUT: Sometimes known as brook trout, the most elusive, the best eating. They are found in most of the rivers and creeks, and small lakes adjacent to Superior. When found along Superior's shoreline they are known as Coasters.

Artificial lures, flies, grubs, garden worms on a fly rod tempt them, though a casting rod can be used. Coasters should be hunted close to shore, in a bed of boulders or broken cliff rocks, and in small bays.

RAINBOW TROUT: (Steelheads) They are a spring spawning fish and abound in most streams from mid-April to mid-May. After spawning a few stay in streams, most go to the lower reaches of rivers for a change of feed, and some venture in the lake and may be picked up when trolling for lake trout.

NORTHERN TROUT: You'll find 'em in shallow bays where there is an adequate cover of reeds and grass. Some are found in deep and quiet spots in river mouths, and in lakes adjacent to Superior, if the two are connected by a stream without a falls. Use a casting or spinning rod, plugs or spoons.

Walleyed Pike will usually be found in the same waters as Northern Pike and should be fished with the same tackle.

A last word: There is only one real secret about fishing. You can't catch a fish unless you have a hook in the water at the right place at the right time, and the fish are hungry.

DR. LELAND HOLLY ADDS THESE POINTS TO COMMODORE MACMILLAN'S NOTES:

Do not depend upon anyone else for the following:

One or two copper or monel lines, 500 to 600 feet, appropriate reels and rods for bank fishing and deep trolling.

One or two cuttyhunk lines, reels, rods...light tackle for trolling. Penn reels.

Large rolling lures—daredevils, herring, canoe red eyes, etc. Heavy swivels.

Large net—long handle, six feet—if fishing from cruiser. Three prong gaff on long handle.

Usual light tackle, casting, spinning, fly-rods, etc. A Must—Camouflage line.

Wire and gut leaders—regular lures—June bug spinners.

Worms, daredevils, bucktails, hooks, landing nets, 612.

Sneakers or hobnail boots for wading.