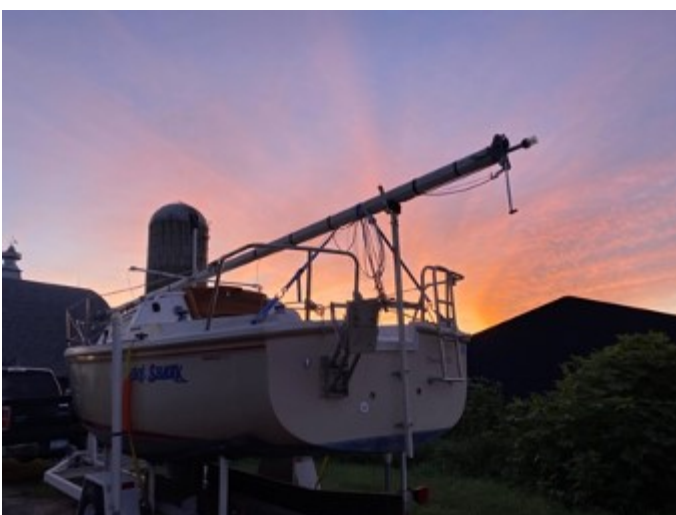




The Adventures of Lake Shark! The Apostle Islands 2020

By Stuart Weist

2020 was certainly a year for the books. With so many things shutting down and racing being cancelled in large part, what is a Catalina 22 sailor to do? Cruise of course. This year our family cruised our Catalina 22 more than we ever have with adventures on Leech Lake in Northern Minnesota, Lake Pepin on the Mississippi, and countless other small trips throughout the summer. However, the one trip that will stand out in our minds for years to come was a trip to the Apostle Islands located in Lake Superior just north of Bayfield, Wisconsin. Having a trailerable boat means that you're never limited on new places to explore or adventures to have. You are only limited by your imagination. This year's plan was to get together with some friends from Wisconsin with their family and cruise for a week in the Apostles. We had never been there but our friends had been several times and their knowledge of the area was priceless. The adventure began with a three-hour drive north where we met up with the rest of our group and spent the night watching the sun set into a beautiful array of colors. I began dreaming of the adventure that we were about to have.



The next morning we awoke, finished final loading and headed north another three or so hours to Little Sand Bay, Wisconsin, our launch location for the week. The ramp has a shallow protected bay and ramp along with a great parking lot for boats and trailers.

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Left: Sunset on the farm.

Above: Sunset from Oak Island.

Photographs by Stuart Weist.

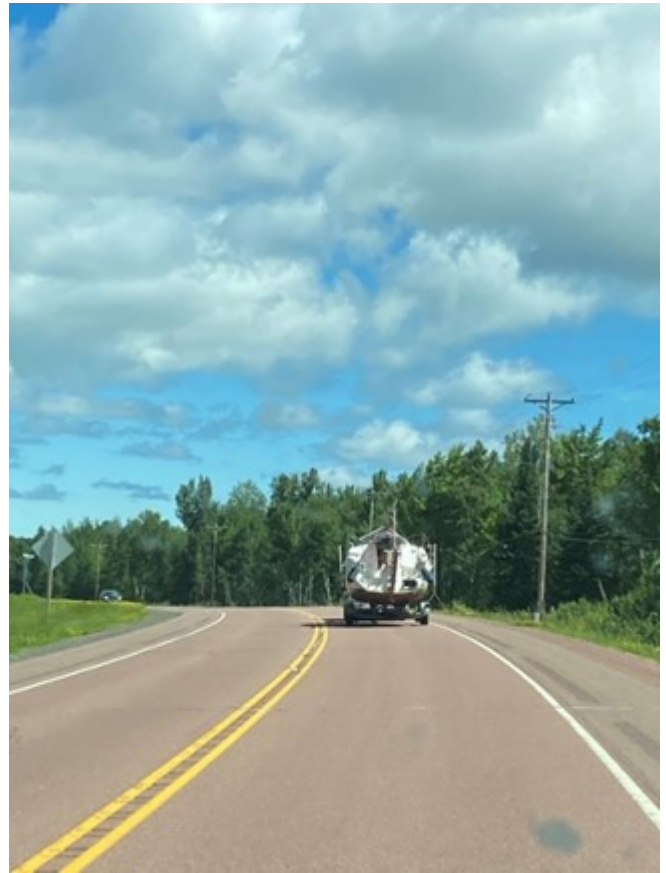
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The normally busy location was empty as the campsites had been closed for the season. As we prepped for launch we noticed that the water was remarkably brown. Talking with a local ranger we learned that a storm had come through a day or so prior which stirred up the bottom. This proved to be quite a challenge when we launched.

Lake Shark was 2nd into the water and having seen our friends launch their H260 with ease I thought no worries, this will be easy. We have a wing keel Catalina 22 drawing 2.6 feet with the rudder installed. As we launched the boat easily floated free and I pulled the truck away leaving my wife to dock the boat. By the time I returned I found her holding fast to the dock with one hand and on to the tiller with the other. The rudder had come loose due to the shallow depth and was trying to float away. Turns out all that sand had filled the inlet and that extra couple inches of the rudder was just too much for the depth we had. I helped remove the rudder and we planned to just motor out a bit where we could install the rudder again. So after inflating the dingy and Mr. Turtle (more on him later) we loaded up the kids and headed out for adventure.

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*Little Sand Bay launch area.
Photograph by Stuart Weist.*



*Road to Bayfield, Wisconsin.
Photograph by Stuart Weist.*



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For those that have never been to the apostles they are a chain of 22 islands near the Wisconsin shoreline just outside of Bayfield Wisconsin.

As we set out, we were hoping to visit a few islands none of us had been to before but knew that the winds would determine our ultimate course. Immediately out of the harbor our breath was taken away by the natural untouched beauty of this place. The shoreline goes from light sand beaches to sandstone cliffs with towering trees. Since the entire chain is part of a National Park there are almost no buildings or developments to be found other than those for navigational aids or old hunting / fishing camps. The islands are beautifully maintained, with various trails, cliffs, and docks to explore.

As we set sail, we immediately headed upwind toward York Island where we made a single tack that would then take us past Raspberry Island. As we passed by Raspberry we were headed for an anchorage on Oak Island and were treated the spectacular view of the Raspberry Island light perched atop the bluff.

While the islands have no natural anchorages many of the shorelines have towering bluffs that depending on wind direction provide safe harbor for a night or two. As we arrived at Oak for the evening we found an island that it looks as if no one had been to it in years. The shoreline had no trash or signs of life except for a single NPS campsite along the shore. But even the campsite had not been used in over a year due to the shutdown and everything looked so pristine. Our family of five laid anchor alongside our friends as we rafted up for the night.

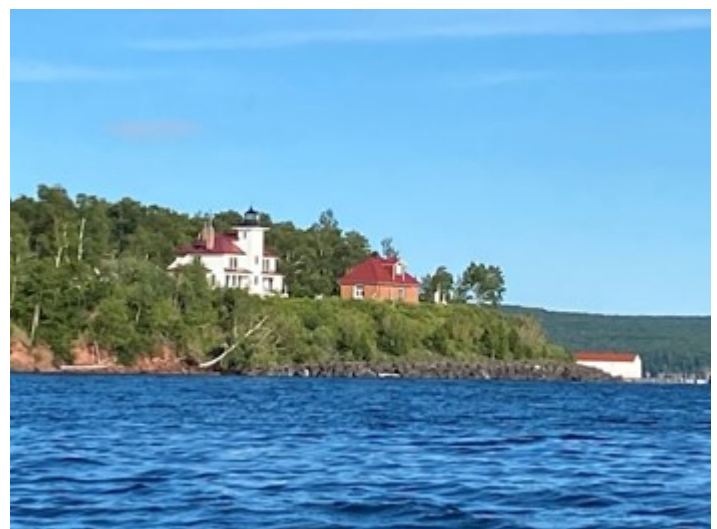
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*Map of Apostles Islands
Photo courtesy of Google Maps*



*Above—Beautiful shoreline.
Below—Raspberry Islands Lighthouse.
Photographs by Stuart Weist.*



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Our kids along with our friends headed to shore as my wife and I began converting the boat for the night. Up went the pop top, enclosure, and bedding so that in only a few moments it seemed we had converted our little sailboat into a condo on the water. As everyone returned to the boats we all gathered to eat supper and make a plan for the next day's adventure while watching the sun sink into the distance in the stillness of the night.

On day 2 we knew that there was weather coming so we left the sails down and the kids sleeping as both boats motored to a safer harbor on Stockton Island. We started right at about dawn into an almost glassy windless sea (lake?), and arrived just as the rain started to come down. Storms over large bodies of water are always interesting as you can see the rain a long way off and know it's coming for you.

Once the rain started it did not finally give up for another entire day but that would not dampen our spirits. After all rain on a boat, what difference does it make if you are wet, you're on a boat. So the kids put on swim suits (they basically lived in them for the week) and swam in the water until they were finally called back for food.

The little harbor we were in had a few larger cruising boats in it and we got to visit with a few of the skippers. One man had a boat that immediately drew our attention as it looked like an older wooden ketch unlike anything I had seen before. Turns out it was hand built, in a labor of love by its owner over 20 years, and that he had circumnavigated the globe in it with his wife and dog. They were exploring the islands as well. They were now into their retirement years but the stories he would tell were spoken in a way where you knew this was a man who had done things

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*Oak Island spring.
Photograph by Stuart Weist.*



*Above—Stockton Island dock.
Photograph by Stuart Weist.*

*Below—Stockton Island beach.
Photograph by Aspen Malminger.*





Above: a group photo. Below: Stockton Island north shore. Photographs by Aspen Malminger.

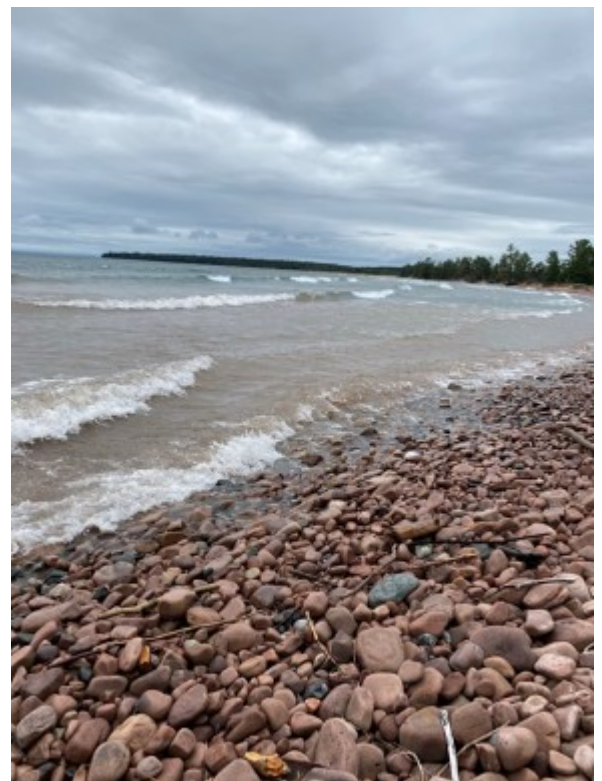
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many of us only dream of. As the rain lightened to a drizzle we began hiking the island and exploring its mysteries.

The trails led us through oaks then steep brush and then only prairie-like grasslands before finally opening not a rocky beach. On the beach we could see the fury of the lake as we watched wind and waves of four to six feet roll in a frosted white bath of excitement driven by the wind.

There would be no leaving the island tonight so it was back to the boats for some supper and game time.

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The next morning we awoke to find that winds were still high and unfavorable but the rain had faded. We decided to go for a longer three-quarter day hike around the back side of the island to see how things looked before deciding whether or not to proceed to a different island for the night.

We took a different trail from the day before. We walked through marshland and sand-filled swales until again finding another rocky beach where we stopped for lunch. The beauty and diversity of the island was indescribable.

We walked along the rocks admiring the agates and admiring the scenery while also noticing the ever-changing landscape of the island.

As we looked to the lake the waves were still more than we really wanted to take on with so many of us in small boats, so we took the rest of the afternoon to meander back on the trail and explore.

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*Group photo Stockton Island beach.
Photograph by Aspen Malminger.*



*Stockton Island prairie.
Photograph by Aspen Malminger.*



*Above: Stockton Island march.
Below: Stockton Island trail.
Photographs by Aspen Malminger.*



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The kids discovered the uncovered remains of an early 20th century ship wreck that was uncovered by the shifting sands as the beach changed from all rock to all sand and back again.

The trail was washed out by winter storm so, in true explore fashion we rolled up our pant legs and removed our shoes to walk along the shore looking for the trail back to the boats. It was truly unforgettable and the views had all us stopping just to take it all in.

The world we left three days prior was in turmoil with Covid concerns, negative news stories of riots and unrest, but here on this beach everything melted away. We would occasionally see another person on the trails but since the islands are only accessed by private boats we were able to be left to the solitude that we all were seeking.

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*Stockton Island sand beach.
Photograph by Aspen Malminger*



*Interesting agates.
Photograph by Aspen Malminger*



*Above: Stockton wreck.
Photograph by Stuart Weist.
Below: Washed out trail..
Photograph by Aspen Malminger*



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As we returned to the boats, the younger kids played again in the water and tried to paddle a log around the harbor.

As the sun set we left the shelter of the dock and anchored for the evening taking turns swimming from the boats and enjoying the crystal clear water. The turquoise colored water is a rarity for those us up in the northern latitudes as many of the rivers and lakes are discolored due to runoff from farms, fields, and factories.

While the water was not the warmest (60s, I would guess) it was swimmable and after the initial shock you got used to it pretty fast. As the sun set the moon rose and we were again reminded of the splendor of the heavens as we called it a night.

The following morning we set sail early heading for outer island.

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*Riding a log Stockton Island
Photograph by Stuart Weist.*



*Above: Western beach Stockton Island
Photograph by Stuart Weist.*

*Left: Lake Shark under sail.
Photograph by Aspen Malminger.*

*Below: Stockton Island Sunset.
Photograph by Stuart Weist.*



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Having been an ocean sailor in the past, I wanted to see just what this big lake looked like without the land in the way. I also really just wanted to be able to say I went to the outer-most point.

We arrived at the outer-Island light to calm seas and tied up next to a NPS boat that was checking on the light.

During a normal season the light houses are open for tours but with all the closures they too were mostly closed but the grounds were ours to explore and explore, we did.

Outer Island is a beautiful, pristine, white tower rising from the trees, the original fog horn is still in place and the rail car used to haul supplies up the bluff is still in use. We were the only visitors and after talking with others we learned this is the least-visited of all the light houses in the Apostles. Its remoteness and often rough seas frequently prevent boats from landing at the dock to access the light.

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*Outer Island Dock.
Photograph by Stuart Weist.*



*Outer Island Light.
Photograph by Stuart Weist.*



*Above: Outer Island Dock.
Photograph by Stuart Weist.*

*Below: Outer Island Light.
Photograph by Aspen Malminger.*





*Sailing away from Outer Island.
Photograph by Aspen Malminger.*



*Above: Rocks on shore.
Photograph by Aspen Malminger.*

*South Twin Anchorage.
Photograph by Aspen Malminger.*



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After exploring the light for a time we again set sail on a downwind to a beam reach. In fact the only upwind sailing we did for the entire trip was for about thirty minutes on the first day out of sand bay. The long downwind run meant it was time to put up the spinnaker.

Although we were not racing and the boat was heavy laden with gear from five people for a week's stay, I still wanted to go fast. Besides we all know spinnakers make for the best photos and with our friend's daughter starting to learn photography we got some amazing pictures.

As we glided past the northern tip of Cat Island and the southern edge of North Twin we finally arrived at our home for the night on South Twin Island after an over four-hour sail that seemed to drift away in the blink of an eye.

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The beach was steep, allowing us to get close to shore but not all the way on shore due to our keel, so we anchored a few yards off as our friends showed off their fantail and swing keel which they could pull right onto the beach. We rigged a pull line from one boat to the other so the kids and young-at-heart could use the dingy to get from one boat to another with ease. We were now more than half way through our adventure and finally Mr. Turtle got some use; remember I said he would come again. Our youngest son had this inflatable turtle that we allowed him to bring if he promised to use it. This silly thing was huge and rode in the dingy behind the boat most of the trip. In fact it was really only used this one time on the entire trip but it was always in the way when we wanted to go to shore. But I will admit it was hilarious to see this giant sea turtle sitting in our dingy as we sailed along; oh the things we do for kids and the memories we make!

Following our night on South Twin and some more hiking, we sailed to Devil's Island for what would be a trip highlight. The Island is mostly sand stone and has the iconic sea caves you see in pictures on it.

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*Sunset on South Twin
Photograph by Aspen Malminger.*

*Devil's Island Caves.
Photograph by Stuart Weist.*



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We paddled the dingy and kayaks though the many caves and even did a bit of cliff jumping from the bluffs.

The winds were perfect that day making it easy to anchor the boats and safely explore the shore line.

Our ability to climb the cliffs and go through the caves was the envy of those on tour boats that passed by occasionally with their entire crew covered in masks. That was a sure sign that we were getting back toward civilization.

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Above: Sea Caves

Below: Exploring by dink.

Photographs by Aspen Malminger



Jumping from cliffs Devils Island Photograph by Aspen Malminger



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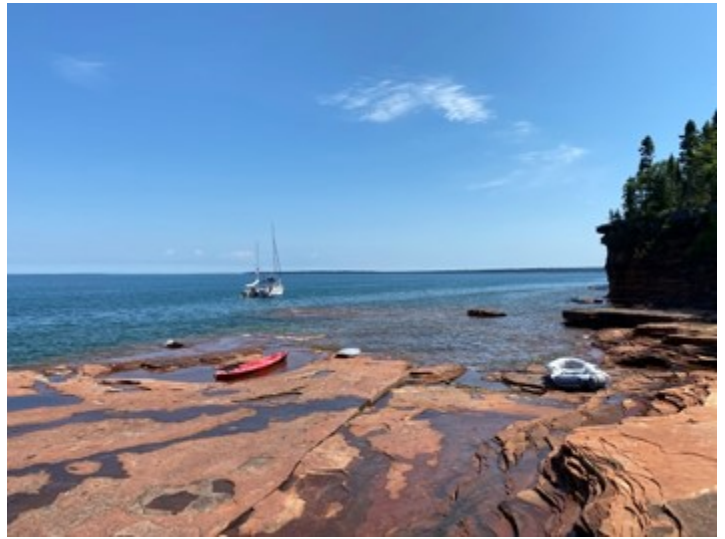
We took the small boats ashore and visited the light on Devil's Island before finally being driven away by biting flies.

These horse flies continued to plague us for the last two days of the trip and so became named the devil flies after the island we found them on. They really are that bad!!

Still, no rain or biting flies were to dampen the spirits of our crew and we sailed on to York Island for our final night. We again explored the beach, skipped rocks, and talked about how much fun it had been (flies and all).

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*Rafted up Devils Island.
Photograph by Stuart Weist.*



*Above: Devil's Island landing.
Photograph by Stuart Weist.*

*Below: Devil's Island landing.
Photograph Stuart Weist.*



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After a slightly more rocky night we sailed over to Raspberry Island to see the light and get an outside tour of the grounds from a local park ranger before returning to Little Sand Bay to pull the boats.

Although we barely scratched the surface of all there is to explore in the Apostles we all left having a great appreciation for this place. The weather was fantastic, solitude oh-so-needed, and adventures unforgettable. I am sure I could write for days about all the smaller adventures like watching a larger sailboat get stuck in the Little Sand Bay channel due to the sand and having to be pushed out by ten or so local swimmers but there is just never enough time. So I will leave you with this thought. If you own a Catalina 22, never let people tell you it can't handle big water like the Great Lakes, or oceans. Never let someone convince you that only two can sleep on board for an extended time, and never let yourself believe "I need a bigger boat" in order to have fun.

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*Above: Raspberry Island light.
Photograph by Stuart Weist.*

*Below: Crew of Lake Shark
enjoying breakfast.
Photograph by Stuart Weist.*



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If it were not for the trailerability of this boat we would never go on so many wonderful adventures. Is it cramped at times with two teens, two adults, and a ten year-old? Yes. However, in a week of cruising covering many miles, we burned less than four gallons of fuel in the boat. Making the entire trip affordable for any family. You just need to have a willing spirit and a desire to go.

Fair Winds my fellow sailors. I can't wait for next year. I wonder what new adventures await SV *Lake Shark* and her amazing crew.



*South Twin Island.
Photograph by Aspen Malminger*