

Apostle Islands Cruise 2026

By Stuart Weist, National Cruising Captain

In the words of Hannibal Smith from the A-Team, “I love it when a plan comes together”. This year was our third bi-annual Apostle Islands cruise and boy did we have the “A-Team”. With 11 boats starting the cruise, we had sailors who were cruise veterans, and we had sailors who were new to cruising and sailing all together. The Apostle’s cruise has grown to be more than just Catalinas boats; it also includes trailer sailors from all over the country who gather on the shores of Lake Superior for a great time. One of our cruisers even completed the trip once again in an 18-foot Capri for the third time!

Our plan this year was ambitious to say the least. For the last five years we have been trying to get to the Devils Island sea caves. These are the best caves in the entire 22 island chain but face North and are often unsafe to access due to high waves and winds that created the caves in the first place. The bottom for anchoring is all sandstone and rock (big rocks) so you can only day anchor in the flattest of conditions, but seeing these has been on everyones bucket list!

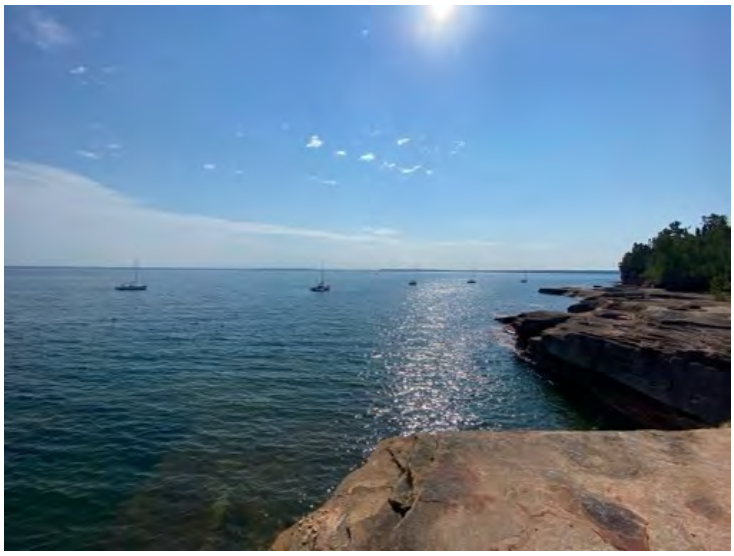
The cruise kicked off with our traditional bar-b-que and ice cream social. There was also a skippers meeting on Sunday evening once the boats were launched and secured in the marina for the night. As we all conferred there was an overwhelming desire to put as many miles behind us on Monday as possible to give us a chance to see the sea caves. Then, wind and weather permitting, we would sail south though the Archipelago to visit Stockton, Michigan Island, and Big Bay on Madeline Island before wrapping things up with a beach bonfire on Long Island to close the cruise. This plan was by far the most ambitions mileage I had ever tried to lead a group this size though. In all we were looking at over 23 nautical miles on just day one without any sailing! In total our plans for the cruise were just over 100 miles without any room for tacks or sailing. Our boat alone recorded closer to 130 miles for the trip. So, we set out bright and early Monday morning for this adventure.



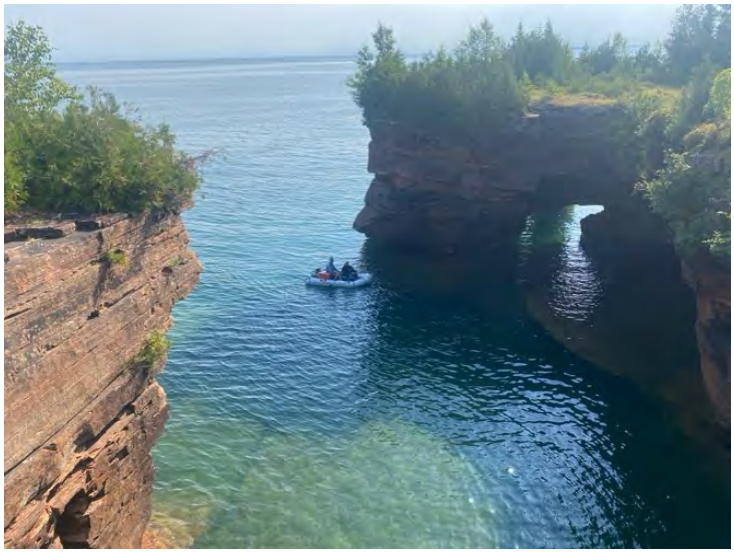
At first winds were light and motors were humming as we made our way to our first stop on Manitou Island to tour the Manitou fish camp that has been resored by the National Parks Service. This stop is a great look back into the past and for a history lover like me it has become a favorite lunch stop as I make my way North though the islands. Unfortnualty, one of our sailors had to turn back due to technical difficulties, so our little armada fell to ten. After lunch we all headed back out and were able to catch some wind as we continued to sail to Rocky Island for our anchorage that nght. The wind was a gentle breze and while mostly on the nose it made for a good time practicing those tacking skills. All boats set anchor a little before sunset, the grills fired up and everyone had supper. Then it was off to the beach for an improptu bonfire thanks to a couple of sailors who brought not only a smokeless fire ring but wood as well! As evening turned to night we prayed the forcast was right and planned for an early start to Devils Island which was only a couple of motoring hours away.



When we awoke, the lake was like glass and conditions were perfect. We fired up our motors and made quick work of the crossing to Devils Island. Once there, we anchored and spent a few hours exploring the light house and paddling though the sea caves. One from our flotilla was from Florida and sailed the trip solo. She was such a trooper and could not believe the amazing beauty of this freshwater ocean and the caves that we went through. Water visibility was crystal clear at 20 to 50 feet, and the glurp of the water filling the underwater caves is a sound no one forgets.



Once we were done at the caves the entire group decided they were up for a long sail all the way back to Stockton Island for the night. It was over 20 miles again for the day. The winds picked up and we were able to sail most of the way. It was a gentle breeze for most of the day ranging from zero to about six knots. Once we rounded the corner of Stockton Island, the lake reminded us who was boss. I was among the first to reach the wind as I often motor when the wind is too light to sail, particularly when we are trying to make that many miles in a day. The wind went from a gentle breeze to somewhere between a small craft and a gale warning. Suddenly we are looking at 25+ mph on the stern and with a full main and a 135% on the bow our little boat was screaming. I immediately went into full race mode and enjoyed the ride. As the wind approached 30 mph though I was starting to wonder just how much my little rig could take. My GPS reads in mph and was pegged out averaging 10 mph and occasionally showing over 12 mph as we tried not to bury the bow into the waves In front of us. Lake Superior



waves are all wind driven and by the time we reached our anchorage it was covered in three-plus footers rolling into the beach. We dropped our sails and started to motor in. Unfortunately, I got too close to a shoal and grounded in about two feet of water. We spun the boat around as we were able to rock ourselves off the soft sand without issue thanks to the breaking wind waves. We dropped the hook not far away and it set quickly. Unfortunately, it felt like we were riding a bucking bronco. The wind was out of the southwest and funneling between islands straight at us. A thunderstorm was incoming, and we made the decision to move to the public dock in a protected bay which was worth the $15 for some piece of mind for the night.



As the other boats arrived having missed our little grounding episode (sorry you all may just be hearing about this now) we found room for everyone on the concrete dock maintained by the parks service that protected us from the wind and waves. The storms passed without incident, and everyone got a good night of sleep.



The next morning our group split in two as some wanted to add some extra miles to see the double light houses on Michigan Island and others just wanted to sail on to our planned anchorage for that night on Madeline Island in Big Bay. As we set out the wind was still up, so I started with a 110% jib on the head-stay, but as things calmed quickly went back to my 135%. I was a little saddened that I forgot my 150% genoa back at the house this year, but I did remember my spinnaker!



As we arrived on Michigan we explored the lighthouse and rocky beach. It is a beautiful island but unfortunately due to budget cuts the parks service decided not to allow volunteers to staff the light house this year, so the museum was closed. After a short stay another boat who was Joining us late caught up and we all headed down wind to Big Bay for the night. As we all settled in everyone enjoyed swimming, hiking on the board walk and another beach side bonfire for the evening. Big bay generally has warmer water due to its shallow sandy bottom so the lake can be as warm as 76 degrees! It was refreshing and a great night.

Morning dawned everyone left at their own pace as we just needed to round Madeline and pull into the Madeline Island Yacht club's marina for the night. They were a gracious host again, and warm showers were a real blessing. As we headed out though I started early and headed way south to get some miles out of that spinnaker I brought along. When I had the wind behind me and thought I could make the rounding I set the big sail and enjoyed a nice three or more-hour cruise never tacking once as I lazily glided though the now small waves at about 4 or 5 mph.



Once everyone arrived, we explored the island some more. This is the only island in the chain not owned by the National Parks Service and they have many unique shops to explore. The candle store is a must stop for most of the ladies on the trip and Tom's Burned Down Bar always draws a crowd. As a group we all decided to eat at Grandpa Tony's for pizza and ice cream, a tradition of sorts, before going to our evening activities. Grandpa Tony's is just a short walk from the marina. On the way back my group decided to hunt for Yooper Lights. These are stones that are only found on Superior and glow under black light. We were successful in finding a couple and everyone was fascinated to see just how bright they are. As the evening was winding down we were also treated to a lunar eclipse which most enjoyed dockside before turning in for the night.



The next morning (Friday) our group was shrinking again. Our family received a call that had us needing to head back a day early and others too needed to get back home or to start their long road trips. The remainder of the group went to Long Island and walked the beach there exploring the light house before returning to anchor off Madeline for one final evening of exploration.



This was a trip for the ages, and never did I think we would be able to see so much in so short of a time. The weather was almost perfect, the sailors were all prepared, and the plan came together for the first time in five years! Now I suppose I need to start thinking of new islands to explore and new places to visit for out 2028 cruise. It should be in late August, so start making plans and preparations to join us again in two years! Who knows who will return and what new adventures we will have. Fair Winds!

