

By Amanda Grooms

S/V Magnetic North

The annual Catalina 22 Great Lakes Cruise is one of the highlights of every summer – a week long gathering of sailors ready to embrace living in their Catalina 22's, eager to relax and explore new fresh and clear northern waters together.

This June, I was thrilled that we got to show off and share our summer stomping grounds – the waters of beautiful Lake Charlevoix in Northern Michigan with stops in Boyne City, Charlevoix, and Petoskey. This particular cruise itinerary is so popular among our Great Lakes Cruises that it has been repeated at least three times in the past 20 years. We sailed out through the Pine River channel into Lake Michigan and explored Little Traverse Bay before returning to Lake Charlevoix at the end of the week.



The Catalina 22' Great Lake Cruise Fleet makes its way through the Pine River Channel out into Lake Michigan. The Charlevoix Lighthouse can be seen off in the distance. S/V Old Blue is leading the way, followed by S/V Whole Lotta Rosie, S/V Viking Dream II, S/V Shark Bait, S/V Spartan, and S/V Magnetic North bringing up the rear. Photograph provided by Amanda Grooms.

Half the group arrived on Saturday and the other half on Sunday to put up the sticks and launch their boats in Boyne City. We stayed Sunday night at the newly refurbished Boyne City F. Grant Moore Municipal Marina. The first gathering under the pavilion is always full of energy, excitement and anticipation. This year, there were only six boats, but a group of 21 in total:

S/V Magnetic North	Douglas & Amanda (me) from Texas/Michigan
S/V Spartan	Steve & Candice from Michigan
S/V Whole Lotta Rosie	Patrick & Heather from Iowa
S/V Old Blue	Andrew, Melody, George, and Olivia from Ohio
S/V Viking Dream II	Rick and Jim from Indiana
S/V Shark Bait	Steve & Diane, and Paul from Illinois (plus “Roo” the dog)

We had Geoff (S/V Inconceivable) and his wife Myra, daughter Shylo and son-in-law Robert with his son Nick join us even though Geoff's boat was out of commission. They all stayed in an AirBnB in Harbor Springs for the week with Geoff making the hour long drive every morning for skipper meetings and joining us for evening get togethers. Our fearless leader of all Great Lakes Cruises – skipper Mike Bracket of S/V 'Smoke – welcomed us at the Sunday evening gathering even though he was unable to join us for this year's cruise. We missed having Mike leading the pack, but we made sure to photo-shop him into our photos throughout the week as if he were there.

The weather was idyllic that Sunday evening as we scarfed down BC Pizza and hugged old friends. What made this year a little different was that there were no new faces on our cruise – we had all been on past cruises together, so it was more like a family reunion. After a picture-perfect sunset over Lake Charlevoix, we slept soundly giddy about the week ahead of us.

Monday morning, after our skipper's meeting, we pushed off the docks around 10 a.m.and began our sailing adventure. 3.5 hours, 16+ miles and 13 tacks later, we arrived at my favorite boat-up to lunch spot, The Landing, right next to the famous Ironton Ferry. The cute Ironton Ferry is a historic, four-car cable ferry that dates back to the 1870s. The Landing was able to get all six Catalinas docked and a table for us outside so we could watch the ferry trek back and forth all 610' across the Ironton narrows. After a superb lunch with impeccable service, we began our afternoon sail logging another 11.7 miles up to the charming town of Charlevoix. Voted one of the best small lake towns in America, there is a reason Charlevoix has the nickname "Charlevoix the Beautiful." It was a quiet evening with everyone doing their own thing and exploring the town on their own. A few people walked out to the lighthouse and examined the small Pine River channel underneath the drawbridge that we would be going through to access Lake Michigan the next morning. The Charlevoix City Marina has bicycles you can use to explore the town and see the famous Mushroom Houses built by the famous Earl Young. Douglas and I used the evening to install our brand-new Joe Waters' mainsail – a bittersweet moment only six weeks after his passing. It was a peaceful night at the marina before an exciting day ahead.

Tuesday morning felt different – the buzz of going underneath the drawbridge and out through the channel was all anyone was talking about. Every half hour, the bridge opens up to let large vessels and sailboats pass between Lake Charlevoix and Lake Michigan. We sent links to family and friends so that they could watch the "Bridge Cams" on YouTube seeing us sail out in real time into Lake Michigan. We decided to catch the 10:30 a.m. bridge opening. By 10:15 a.m. all six of us were out motoring in circles in Round Lake eagerly chatting on VHF radio about who was going first and last and who was going to take pictures of what. That sound of the bridge siren going off and the moment of delay before the bridge began opening – oh, the amount of excitement that had built up was palpable. The squeals of excitement could be heard by our friends and family watching on the bridge cam as one by one, we passed under the bridge. This was definitely one of the highlighted events of this cruise if not our most



Passing underneath the Charlevoix Drawbridge leaving beautiful Lake Charlevoix heading towards Lake Michigan. Photo taken off the stern of S/V Old Blue.

Friends and family tuning in to the Charlevoix Bridge Cam on YouTube watching us sail out into Lake Michigan through the Pine River Channel. This image was captured by the son of Steve and Candice on S/V Spartan who was watching on his laptop from his dorm room in Houghton, Michigan.



memorable moment. The dinging of the bridge closing behind us and the lighthouse in front of us, we motored into Lake Michigan before turning north and putting up the sails to head towards Petoskey.

Lake Michigan was kind to us that day. It was calmer waters with good clips of sailing conditions; a few opting to motor-sail in lighter winds. Turning more easterly into Little Traverse Bay, we found the winds picking up and the seas growing to two-to-three feet following swells. After 22.2 miles of sailing with only three tacks, we dropped the sails in washing machine like conditions before motoring into the Petoskey City Marina.

We immediately were greeted by the sounds, sights, and smells of construction – a very loud consistent banging with screeching metal sounds directly across from our slips. A late ice melt this past winter delayed the repair of a few docks, so our view off the stern was of the smokey, oily barge fixing dock pylons. The marina staff assured us they would be stopping by 6pm, which thankfully did happen. Another surprise was that our docks weren't floating docks, which meant there was quite a steep step down onto the cockpit decks. Luckily, our group knows how to roll with the punches and were nimble enough to get in and out of their boats without much difficulty.

The crew of S/V Old Blue took the rest of the day to visit a waterfall and go Petoskey Stone hunting along the shores, while the majority of us met up a local craft brewery and sampled their beers. While most were delicious, one beer was so disgusting that a four-ounce glass was tasted and disapproved of by 14 different sets of taste buds – a funny moment that will not soon be forgotten. We walked around downtown and ended up in the basement of the famous Stafford's Perry Hotel for dinner at the Noggin Room – a dark, cozy tavern serving delicious pizzas, huge burgers, scrumptious desserts and an unlimited supply of free popcorn. After a stunning (and luckily quiet) sunset back at the marina, we watched the moon rise from under the pavilion to the sound of guitars and singing by Patrick (S/V Whole Lotta Rosie) and Steve (S/V Shark Bait).

We were all thrilled to learn the construction crew was not going to work on Wednesday due to the light rain all day long. It was the perfect off-day – naps for those of us wanting to listen to the rain fall on the cabin roofs, roaming the streets for unique gifts and trinkets, and even sailing across the bay to Harbor Springs and back for a few of our skippers. In the late afternoon, everyone met up under the pavilion for the annual "White Elephant Gift Exchange" and were treated to homemade "Pain Killers" – a frozen cocktail made by Steve and Candice of S/V Spartan. They even brought their own blender from home!! As the rain sprinkled around us, we remained dry and shared laughs as the only question that needed to be answered was to open a new gift or steal your neighbors. The clouds parted and we all headed in to town for dinner. A group of 4 boats worth of crew opted to eat at Mitchell Street Pub – we each had our own table and sat across from one another tucked away in the back of the packed restaurant. Our lively waiter took great care of us and even took a group picture for us. We ventured into a store

nearby where I think most of us bought the exact same jacket – two for $20. If you see us matching on future cruises, know that we just couldn't resist this deal. As tradition, we HAD to eat ice cream at the local Murdick's Fudgery. We even took a picture to send to Mike, our fearless leader, to prove that we didn't break tradition of trying the local ice cream on every cruise. Another late evening under the pavilion with more music and hot showers at the marina before falling fast asleep.

Thursday morning meant returning to Charlevoix. At the morning skipper's meeting, Geoff relayed the weather update that although there was NO wind in the morning, that it was predicted to pick up quite a bit in the afternoon – up to 18 knots perhaps. We said goodbye to the Petoskey City Marina and the construction crews and began motoring back to Charlevoix. There was a tentative plan to try and time going through the channel and drawbridge together again, but that was a pipe dream. Most of us motored for a while; a few put up a sail and motors ailed, and S/V Old Blue flew their spinnaker. Last to leave the marina and the first to arrive back in Charlevoix, they surely showed their racing background.

There isn't much I could say that could explain the dramatic change in the lake conditions. What started as glassy water turned into four-to-five-foot choppy waves blowing in hard from the northeast within minutes. Little Traverse Bay was flat calm and the moment you turned slightly southwest to head to Charlevoix became a totally different sail. For me personally, it was bigger conditions than I wanted to be in, but we had to keep plugging along. It became clear that three of us were going to try and make the 3:30 p.m. bridge opening, and the last three boats were going to make the 4 p.m. opening. S/V Old Blue and S/V Spartan passed the lighthouse and made it into the calmer waters heading down the channel as the bridge opened. As we on S/V Magnetic North were sailing into the channel, the final five-foot swell that pushed us into the channel sheared our rudder straight off and bent the metal housing. (We will save this dramatic story for a future *MainBrace* article.) Needless to say, we did not make the 3:30 p.m. bridge opening but instead were towed in by S/V Whole Lotta Rosie at the 4 p.m. opening – our heads hung in defeat and a tremendous amount of relief that we made it back to the slip safely at the Charlevoix City Marina. *big sigh* After regaling the "what happened" with the rest of the skippers, we ate dinner at a local Mexican restaurant and did a quick walking tour of the Mushroom Houses and the local library. IYKYK. A long hot shower and an early night was in store for us, while everyone else enjoyed the park-like atmosphere along the shores of Round Lake in Lake Charlevoix.

Early Friday morning, we on S/V Magnetic North left our slip and motored the 14.3 miles back to East Jordan, MI – our summer home and local dock on the south arm of Lake Charlevoix. We made it home in two-and-a-half hours and thanked our Tohatsu SailPro 6 for steering us back to our slip safely. S/V Whole Lotta Rosie also left early Friday morning and had to pull their boat out early due to a medical emergency back home. Three of the remaining skippers left for Boyne City at 10 a.m., while the crew of S/V Old Blue opted to attend the used book sale at the Charlevoix Library that began at 10 a.m. that morning. Two HUGE boxes full of books later, they shoved off the marina around 10:30 a.m.. The four remaining sailboats made it back to Boyne City between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m.. Douglas and I drove over to meet them on arrival.

Friday nights in Boyne City are a big deal. During the summer, they host “Stroll the Streets” where musical groups perform on every street corner. Sometimes they host car shows or boat shows but everyone strolls the streets and shops, most of them licking ice creams and enjoying the perfect weather. Everyone eats dinner out and none of the places take reservations during “Stroll the Streets”. Our final big group sendoff dinner was at the Lake Street Pub. Numerous prior phone calls and talks with the manager were made in hopes to accommodate our large group. They far surpassed our expectations. We had a group of 15 people plus a dog, and we all sat together with no wait time. Our waiter, Aiden, handled our large group with precision and personality. With full bellies, we took our annual group photo in front of the building next door with a large mural stating “It’s Drinking Weather!” We continued to stroll the streets for a little while and hung out in the marina Adirondack chairs for a few more hours before calling it bedtime.

Douglas and I were home in 15 minutes and our boat already in her slip. Everyone else pulled out Saturday morning and headed home to their respective states. It was another jam-packed week of sailing, motoring, eating, drinking, laughing and having fun. Total nautical miles this cruise on S/V Magnetic North: 71.93NM.

A few things that stand out to me personally that need a mention:

- It was super cool that Geoff’s grandson was invited on-board to crew with Patrick and Heather on S/V Whole Lotta Rosie from Boyne City to Charlevoix;
- Thank you to Diane on S/V Shark Bait for baking DOZENS AND DOZENS of cookies that we ate every single night all week long;
- It was very special to have three veteran cruisers with us this year – Jim and Rick on S/V Viking Dream II and Geoff have sailed this exact itinerary with the Great Lake Cruise back in 2009 and in 2017;

• The crew of S/V Shark Bait selflessly volunteered to help rig and de-rig another sailboat in our group – the way people help out one another is remarkable;
• Patrick and Heather on S/V Whole Lotta Rosie really swooped in and saved us when we were disabled without a rudder bouncing off the north break wall in the channel. Many more thanks to everyone who cheered us up after our unfortunate accident, particularly Geoff who greeted us at the dock with news of an extra rudder back in his garage in Indy – this really is a remarkable story to be told in a later *MainBrace* article;
• I was so excited to show off Lake Charlevoix. The staff at The Landing restaurant and the Lake City Pub were so outstanding and made me really proud of the place we call summer home.

And most importantly:

• I mentioned that we didn't have any new faces on our cruise this year, and that it felt more like a family reunion. I think it was a really special dynamic that we all knew one another already. We all know the saying "you can't choose your family" but what is even cooler is that when we start the week already like family, that we still end the week as friends, and that is really saying something.

Please join us next year for our Great Lakes Cruise (to be announced even though we already kinda know where we are going and it is REALLY exciting)! We are a SUPER fun group (not biased at all) that would LOVE to add you to our cruising family.



Author Amanda Grooms and Douglas Doring aboard their Catalina 22 "Magnetic North".