

Shore Patrol

If you love the sea and the land, there's nothing better than a scenic trek around Lake Superior.

BY SUSAN ZIMMERMAN

There's no official starting point for circumnavigating the 3 quad-

rillion gallons of the largest freshwater lake in the world. So travelers should just pick a spot and go with the flow past three states, a Canadian province and a deluge of roadside attractions. Green-and-white Lake Superior Circle Tour signs will show the way.

This land cruise is about discovering the rugged shoreline and wilderness that surrounds the greatest of the Great Lakes, so explorers should take the time to enjoy the drive. Besides, the fastest circle time, 21 legal hours by motorcycle, has already been done. My husband and I figured two weeks would allow us to complete the circle at a relaxed pace, so we packed up our daughter, put the Winnebago View on cruise control and pushed off.

This legendary lake is revered by the Ojibwa Indians who have inhabited the area for more than 500 years, treasured by the 18th-century French-Canadian voyageurs and feared by sailors. Superior's legacy is rich, and its natural features, overflowing with beaches, coves and waterfalls, takes a back seat to no other lake.

A TALE OF SHORES

Superior, which contains 10 percent of the earth's fresh surface water, is fed by more than 300 streams and rivers. This cleanest and clearest Great Lake could cover North and South America to a depth of one foot if loosed. Bounded by some 2,726 miles of shoreline (counting the islands), Superior is a tale of shores—the Upper Peninsula, Wisconsin and the North Shores of Minnesota and Ontario.

Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., marks the beginning of Superior's southern route along the Upper Peninsula, or

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U.P. The route runs across 700 miles of scalloped coastline and peninsulas in Michigan and Wisconsin. This stretch is filled with miles of sand beaches, towering dunes and resident “Yoopers,” known for their often-mocked colloquial slang—“Say ya to da U.P., eh?”

Landmarks that help chart the clockwise course include the historic Soo Locks, which link lakes Superior and Huron; the shores of Gitche Gumee, which Longfellow made famous in his epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha*; and Whitefish Point’s tragic coast and well-known shipwreck, the *Edmund Fitzgerald*. One of the defining landscapes along the South Shore is Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore’s multicolored sandstone cliffs.

Summer comes late to Michigan’s Keweenaw Peninsula, where the town of Copper Harbor is just waking up from its winter hibernation in late June. This northernmost part of the U.P. has an average annual snowfall of more than 200 inches. Some 200 miles down the road, activities are already heated up on Wisconsin’s Bayfield Peninsula—its namesake town hosts a sailboat race around the Apostle Islands.

THE NORTH SHORE

Making port in Duluth, Minn., after cruising the U.P. makes for a great break. Checking out the city’s popular Lakewalk along Superior and stopping by Canal Park to watch the lakers (lake carriers), salties (saltwater vessels) and Aerial Lift Bridge will make the weariest of circlers eager to continue the voyage.

Duluth lies at the threshold of the North Shore—a 150-mile stretch jam-packed with eight state parks, lakeside towns, lodges, Adirondack chairs and stunning views. Those who have driven this section can attest it’s slow going because there’s so much to see. Edging along the coast-hugging road soaking up the



PHOTOGRAPHY BY RANDALL HYMAN



The 1910 Split Rock Lighthouse (opposite) stands sentinel over the North Shore. The *Edmund Fitzgerald*'s bell (above, left) rests in the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum. A calmer period along Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore allows the author time for reflection (above, right).

luscious scenery, with lots of fast-braking stops along the shoreline to skip rocks and swim, can take days.

The shore’s many signature sites, starting at Split Rock Lighthouse and ending at Grand Portage National Monument, along with poking around the rock-covered beaches looking for the lake’s famous agates, inspires circlers (and rock hounds) to see what lies around the curve ahead.

“You know you’ve been around Superior when your shoulder aches from skipping rocks,” said my husband.

PLANNING YOUR TRIP

Two guidebooks are better than one on this trip. *Lake Superior: the Ultimate Guide to the Region* by Hugh E. Bishop is an in-depth reference that lists the stops in alphabetical order. *Lake Superior Travel Guide* magazine has much of the same information but lists the sites in clockwise order, which makes following along easier.

The guides complement one another and are both a must to keep handy. They will definitely open your eyes to what lies ahead and maybe keep you from missing something.

Be sure to check out the Lake Superior Circle Tour Club—membership and a completion certificate are both free. A final word of advice to first-time circlers: Cruising around the lake in a Winnebago View makes for a superb road companion for this Superior drive.

Call (888) 244-5253 or visit www.lakesuperior.com for information. Contact your AAA Travel agent for reservations and maps.

THE OTHER NORTH SHORE

For travelers interested in closing the circle, read Zimmerman’s Web Bonus, Superior’s Other North Shore: Ontario, as well as her Circle Tips for the Road, at www.HomeAndAwayMagazine.com.

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