

# Chesapeake Paddler



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## Apostle Islands Adventure

By Cyndi Janetzko

Over the years I have compiled a "places to paddle someday" list filled with destinations such as the San Juan Islands, Baja, the Everglades, Georgian Bay, the Maine Island Trail and the Apostle Islands. Bit by bit, I've been making my way through that list. So when Yvonne Thayer started planning a week long Apostle Islands trip for early September, I jumped at the chance.

The Apostles are 21 islands scattered off the coast of Lake Superior in north western Wisconsin (see locator map). Featuring soft sand beaches, rocky cliffs, extraordinary sea caves and more lighthouses than any other coastline in the United States, the Apostles are a premier destination for kayakers. The Apostles can also be a challenging place to paddle: Weather changes rapidly and the water is near always freezing. Going with a local who knows the area and its moods is a definite plus.

**Clayton told us how buying a chart was silly, since all the locals navigated the Apostle Islands by using a placemat bought in the Visitor Office for \$4.50. We each got one to put on our decks.**

Yvonne tapped Clayton White for the role of local. Clayton, from Grand Marais, appeared at Jack's Boathouse in Georgetown in the spring of 2006. He'd come to DC to help out his brother, but quickly became a regular at the Pirates of Georgetown. Clayton knows Lake Superior. In fact, in 2005 he had paddled all the way around its 950-mile shoreline. He also likes to go fast. He did it in just 24 days, over 38 miles per day!

Our trip would be a little less ambitious, as we had just a week. We kept the group small in order to make the logistics easier and ended up with Nelson Labbe (poor Caroline had to work), Dave Biss, Yvonne, Clayton and me. Several conference calls and many emails later, we had a plan.

Clayton would be our chauffeur and boat provider. Having heard stories of how he subsisted on Lipton one pot dinners during his entire Lake Superior circumnavigation, we decided to handle the cooking. Dave, Nelson and I flew into Duluth on Saturday September 1, where we met Clayton. Yvonne arrived later that day by bus from Minneapolis.

Labor Day is one of the busiest weekends in the Apostles making campsites difficult to reserve. Thus, we opted to be tourists in Duluth on Saturday, exploring the new waterfront area and the Aerial Lift Bridge. We also toured the local grocery stores to pick up last-minute supplies. Sunday, we went for a day paddle as a shake down of the rental boats. A word of advice here, when relying on rental boats, be prepared for them to not be as nice, as comfortable, as fast, or as dry as is your boat at home. We ended up fashioning hip pads out of foam blocks and reallocating gear to drier hatches.



Yvonne, Clayton, Dave, Cyndi and Nelson under an Apostles Island arch

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As we paddled the 7.5 miles due North the fog would move in and out

Photo by Dave Biss

Monday morning we headed to Little Sand Bay, just over an hour from Duluth, to pick up our camping permit and set out for the next 5 nights. In that time, we hoped to sample a good number of the islands and camp on Oak, Outer and Sand Islands. The weather would dictate otherwise.

Throughout the trip, we kept a journal of our days. What follows is an excerpt. For the complete story and all the pictures visit our website

[http://www.chesapeakekayakco.com/trip\\_reports/apostle\\_islands/a\\_islands\\_report.htm](http://www.chesapeakekayakco.com/trip_reports/apostle_islands/a_islands_report.htm).

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**Nelson Labbe – Thursday September 6, 2007**

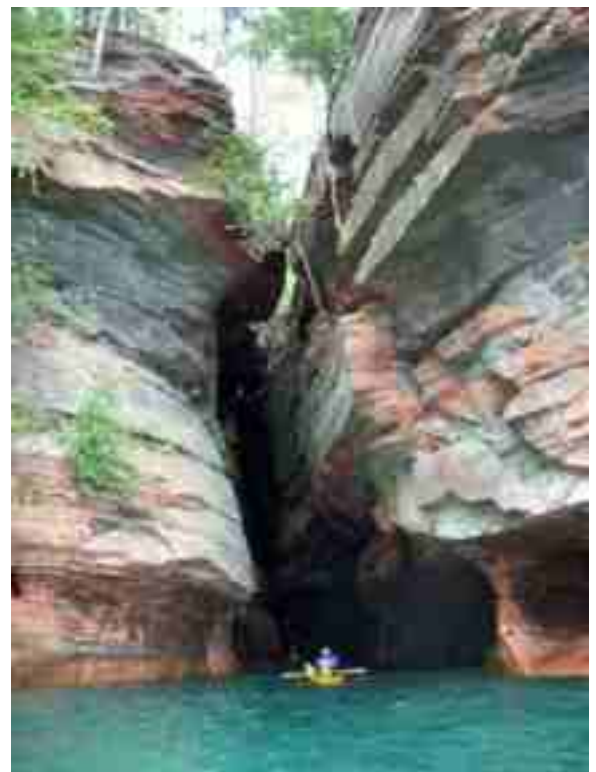
You can always expect some days to be better than others. Yesterday certainly seemed to be one of those better days. Originally yesterday we were to paddle to Outer Island, but our schedule was modified by bad weather. Specifically, Tuesday we had planned to paddle to Devil's Island to explore the sea caves. Heavy winds from the northeast caused us to delay the open water crossing until Wednesday. The only sticking point was that we didn't have the campsite reserved for another night. The plan that developed was to paddle to Devil's and try to contact the rangers to see if we could get the campsite for another night.

The weather on Wednesday started out calm, but overcast with some areas of fog. Earlier we had been able to see Devil's Island from our campsite, some 7 miles away, but this morning all we could see was fog in the direction of Devil's. So we charted a heading of due north and set off. We maintained good speed but for a long time we paddled towards nothingness. The sun came out but still nothing appeared. Then we entered the heavy fog bank. Paddling in fog gives me an eerie feeling. The water in each direction disappeared into a heavy grayness. Very disorientating. Just trust your compass and keep paddling while making sure that you don't lose sight of your paddling partners. And keep paddling towards nothing. Finally we got a glimpse of the island – directly ahead of us. Yea! The fog then took the island away again and we didn't see it for another half hour or so when it appeared about 100 feet ahead of us. What a relief!

Clayton's plan was to circle around the island in a clockwise fashion. Soon we had spectacular red cliffs on our right and colorful boulders and ledges underneath us. Some of the fog stayed with us, but the sun would occasionally peak out. We started coming upon some caves and took every opportunity to paddle into and through them. One was big enough for all of us to congregate inside, each coming in through a different entrance!

The water seemed to be getting bouncier as we made our way around the island. This made it a little more challenging to enter, pass through and exit some of the later caves. Eventually it became too rough to enter anymore caves. A cave entrance that appeared calm could turn into a crashing mess of white water converging from several sides. By now the sun was mostly burning through the fog and we were all feeling great to be paddling in such a beautiful spot. We stopped for lunch and reveled in finally making our way to and around Devil's Island. Except one detail – we didn't have our current campsite reserved for the coming evening.

Clayton had hoped to be able to reach the rangers during the excursion to Devil's. He did from the lighthouse there, but the bad news was that we would have to move. He made a reservation for us for 2 nights at campsite #3 on Oak. Oakie – doakie! That meant a rush back to our campsite to break it down, pack up, load the boats and paddle to the new campsite, unpack the boats and set up camp. And apparently we were supposed to vacate our current campsite by 3:00 p.m. Clayton offered to race back to the campsite and we would follow as best we could. We made good time back at about 4 mph, but Clayton arrived about a half hour before us and informed the new arrives that we would soon all be there to start packing up and be gone.



Some of the best natural arches and sea caves that we see during the entire trip Photo by Dave Biss

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When we arrived we broke camp and packed the boats within an hour! That was fast! We started setting up camp in about another hour and a half. What a day! Open water paddling, heavy fog, numerous caves to explore, gorgeous location and scenery and water, crashing waves, emerging sunshine, a rush back to camp, break camp, new campsite, packing boats, unpacking boats, a total of over 21 miles (a personal high). At this point everyone else took a swim in the frigid water. Lots of shrieking, laughing and some splashing to invigorate some tired bodies ensued. And after all this Dave & Cyndi cooked up a feast of couscous and Indian fare. I was famished and the food was truly excellent. The temperature was feeling warm so I ended the day with taking my turn in the chilly water. What a perfect way to end a hectic, but great day!

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In the end we only visited a few of the islands due the Superior's fickle nature. However we experienced some of the best the area had to offer – the sea caves of Devil's Island and Squaw Bay, the bald eagles and hiking trails of Oak Island, the crystal clear water, and the temperamental weather. All of this was topped off by wonderful paddling companions and some great food! I can't wait to go back to explore some more.



We played in the first 'sorta' sea caves we saw off of Point Detour on the mainland Photo by Dave Biss

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#### Logistics:

**Getting There:** Unless you have a lot of time on your hands to drive, you will probably need to fly up north. Duluth, MN is the closest airport at just over an hour drive. Alternatively you can fly into Minneapolis, WI which is about 3 ½ hours away.

**Boats and Gear:** There are several outfitters offer organized tours and provide outfitting services in the Apostle Islands. If you plan to rent a boat without a guide you will likely have to take a half day class and/or demonstrate that you can do a wet exit and self rescue. The most commonly used outfitters are:

Living Adventure – [www.livingadventure.com](http://www.livingadventure.com)

Trek and Trail – [www.trek-trail.com](http://www.trek-trail.com)

**Camping and Permits:** Camping is available on 18 of the lakeshore's islands and at one campsite on the mainland. Permits are required and individual sites are \$10 per night. The permit system allows campers to reserve campsites 30 days in advance. Call as soon as you are 30 days out for the best chance of getting the site you want. Most of the campsites have an outhouse, fire ring, bear box and picnic table. Fires are typically allowed but may be restricted in particularly dry times.

In Duluth the Snowflake Cross Country Ski Area (<http://www.skiduluth.com/>) turns into a camping area when the snow disappears.

**Launch Sites:** There are several launch sites for the Apostles including Little Sand Bay, Redcliff, Meyers Beach and Bayfield. Bayfield has the larger ranger station and is the park headquarters however you can pick up your permit at Little Sand Bay if you ask in advance. Meyers Beach is the closest launch to explore the largest of the areas sea caves located on the mainland coast at Squaw Bay.



## SK101 Training Session

SK101, the land-based introduction to sea kayaking course, will be taught this year on Saturday, March 1. Registration will open January 7, 2008, so let your new and wanna be paddling friends know. Topics covered include kayak history and construction, kayak safety, paddles, gear, places to paddle, and a demonstration of cold water gear.

This course is particularly for new members, so people who have been members a while need to get the word out to others who may be new to our sport and would benefit from SK101. Jenny Welker-Plummer is developing a flyer to publicize the event and would love to have your help getting the word out.

Contact her by email at [plummer\\_welker@verizon.net](mailto:plummer_welker@verizon.net) for more info and to obtain some copies. Registration is being handled by Gina Cicotello. Contact

Brian Blankinship on paddles at last year's SK101

her at [ginacico@earthlink.net](mailto:ginacico@earthlink.net)