

Lake Superior Circle Tour

Wow! That lighthouse is awesome! We have got to ride up there to see that! That was our initial reaction after seeing a postcard of the Split Rock Lighthouse, located on the shore of Lake Superior. That postcard is what sparked our interest in the Lake Superior lighthouses and eventually planning a trip around the lake. This happened while on a long weekend trip up to Sault Ste Marie in the fall of 2005.

It didn't take much research to find out that Lake Superior is usually cool and comfortable during the summer months. This would be a great getaway from Hotlanta, Georgia for a little relief from the heat. We planned to enjoy our 28th anniversary while we were on this trip, so the week of June 18, 2006 would be the target date.

Several months prior to our trip, Karen and I bought a few books about Great Lakes lighthouses and a book specifically about traveling around Lake Superior. Plus, I reviewed several internet sites and asked for suggestions on the Motorcycle Tourer's Forum message board online. These were excellent resources that allowed us to plan the most out of a week's vacation.

The ride up to Michigan was pretty much uneventful. The farther north we got, the cooler the temperatures. This made for excellent riding conditions since Karen and I wear protective jackets, boots, gloves, etc. On the way through Michigan there were a couple of sights we wanted to see before we started our Lake Superior Circle Tour.

The first item on our agenda was to ride a scenic road called "The Tunnel of Trees". This is a section of hwy 119 between Harbor Springs and Cross Village, Michigan. It was a beautiful, twisty road through a canopy of trees along Lake Michigan that runs about 20 miles in length. At times, you would be able to see the shoreline of Lake Michigan. A bonus at the end of the Tunnel of Trees was a well known restaurant called "Legs Inn", located in Cross Village.



Legs Inn gets its name from oven legs mounted on the outside of the restaurant as ornaments. Authentic Polish cuisine is their specialty. Karen and I were delighted with both of the Polish entrees that we ordered, especially since we are both conservative eaters. Inside the restaurant is filled with a collection of nature and hand-carved creations that make for a unique blend of “Old World” European and Native American cultures.



From the Legs Inn, we ride about 30 minutes to cross the great Mackinac Bridge (pronounced Mac-in-naw, the same as Mackinaw City). This is one of the longest suspension bridges in the world. The Mackinac Bridge connects Michigan’s two peninsulas, the main part of Michigan, or Lower Peninsula, to Michigan’s Upper Peninsula.

Mackinac Island was next on our list. If you’ve never heard of Mackinac Island, transportation on the island is limited to horse and buggy, bicycle or foot. We walk around the small town shops before we rent a couple of bicycles to ride around the perimeter of the island. The 8.3 mile bike ride was not only great exercise, but filled with beautiful shoreline scenery. Afterward, we treat ourselves to some of Mackinac Island’s world famous fudge. A steady rain set in for the rest of the afternoon, so, we decide to take the ferry back to the mainland.

Our actual Lake Superior Circle Tour begins in Sault Ste Marie, Michigan, where we cross the International Bridge into Sault Ste Marie, Ontario (Canada). As we cross the bridge, we could see a huge ship in the Soo Locks below us. Canadian customs were no problem. The officer asked us “Where were we from, what was our Nationality, and where were we going?” After we answered all of his questions, he waved us through. We did carry our passports with us, just in case they were needed.

The ride from Sault Ste Marie to Wawa, Ontario was awesome! The rugged wilderness along the shoreline was spectacular. Not too long after seeing a road sign warning for moose, I spot a moose on the other side of a small lake. Karen missed it, so we turn around to give her a chance to see this massive beast. Since there was virtually no traffic, we stop in the road to watch the moose. The moose didn't stay long as we watched it drink, then turn around and walk back into the tree line.

Back on the road, we see a sign for the Agawa Indian paintings, so we stop to check them out. We park the bike and then hike down between these giant rock crevices and giant boulders to the Lake Superior shoreline. The scenery on the way down was unbelievable. The paintings are located on a sheer wall right next to the water. There are several signs, warning of injury or death caused from falling or being swept into the lake by the waves. The Agawa paintings date back 1,500 years. They were a special treat to see, especially since we didn't know they would be along our route.





Our next stop was Aguasabon Falls. This was a beautiful waterfall just a short hike from the parking lot. With a little extra effort, there is a short path leading off the main trail that will give you a better view of these falls.

Down the road from the falls, we pass another moose grazing in the side ditch. We continue down the road about a hundred yards before turning around. Then, we stop to get the camera out of the trunk. Karen hangs the camera around her neck before we ride back to where the moose was eating. Again, we stop in the road so she can take a picture. Karen seems to have a problem with the camera. The moose gets restless as we sit on a parked motorcycle some 20 yards away. He slowly turns and walks into the trees as if he doesn't feel like dealing with us today. Come to find out, the camera battery is low and the camera won't power on.

As we continue on to Thunder Bay, we run into road construction approximately 30 miles east of the city. Here, the road was completely gone and we had to ride on a dirt and gravel base. Evidently, the Canadians removed a whole section of this road before replacing it. Lucky for us, it was a dry day.

On the east side of Thunder Bay is the Terry Fox Scenic Overlook just off of hwy 17. We ride up there to check it out. From here, there is a wonderful view of the city of Thunder Bay, the harbor and a mass of land know as "The Sleeping Giant". On a clear day, you can see for miles.

Approximately 30 miles north of Thunder Bay is Kakabeka Falls. These falls are known as the Niagara Falls of Canada. There were several wooden viewing platforms and a bridge to walk or drive across to the other side. These waterfalls were beautiful.



To us, the Canadian attractions were not as commercialized as the U.S. attractions. This really added to the beauty since they weren't cluttered up with concrete, rails and signs.

After a full day in Thunder Bay, we continue on our counter-clockwise circle of the lake. The ride between Thunder Bay, Ontario and Grand Marais, Minnesota was very pretty. We started seeing more farmland than we had seen since starting our circle tour. There were beautiful pink and purple flowers growing wild along the road. These were very unique flowers that we'd never seen before. Crossing back into the U.S. at the Canadian/Minnesota border was no problem. Again, we just answered a few questions before the officer waved us through.

We stop in Grand Marais to photograph a lighthouse in their harbor. The harbor was very calm and serene on this particular morning. From there, we head to Split Rock Lighthouse.

Split Rock Lighthouse is spectacular! This lighthouse was just as awesome as the postcard that inspired our trip. The visitor center offered guided tours and a movie. We opt to walk around the area on our own. Next to the lighthouse, there is also a small compound of living quarters and other buildings that are accessible to visitors. We advise taking the walking trail down to the lake shore for the best view of this magnificent lighthouse.



Two Harbors lighthouse was next on our list. As we pull into town, we see a bad storm brewing just west of us. We spot the lighthouse. The plan is to hurry and take a few pictures of the lighthouse, then get back on the bike and find a place to eat lunch before the storm arrives. We do just that. As we sit in Blackwoods Bar & Grill eating lunch, the storm blows through and within minutes the sky clears up. What perfect timing! But, the storm did manage to bring in strong winds that lasted the rest of the day.

We fought the winds all the way to Duluth Harbor. There is a lovely little park in the harbor area where you can view 3 different lighthouses. There was also a unique drawbridge that lifted the entire bridge up to allow ships to pass beneath it. We didn't know exactly what the bridge was until we saw it in action. There was some very complex engineering built into that bridge.

As we continue on our route, we stop to photograph several more lighthouses. These include: Wisconsin Point lighthouse in Superior, Wisconsin, and the following lighthouses in Michigan: two lighthouses in Ontonagon, Sand Hills lighthouse at Five Mile Point (which has been converted to a Bed & Breakfast), Eagle Harbor lighthouse, Copper Harbor lighthouse in Ft. Wilkins State Park, Bete Grise lighthouse (which has been converted into a private residence), Marquette lighthouse and Munising lighthouse.

It looks like lighthouses are slowly fading away due to the new technologies available. Today, the active lighthouses are probably used as backup navigational sources in case the new technology fails.

About 15 miles south of Bete Grise, we see an oncoming car stopped in their lane, so we slow down. All of a sudden we see two small bear cubs. These little guys were not quite

knee high as they gallop across the road. Now, we start scanning the area for mama bear, but she is no where to be seen. More than likely, she crossed the road before we got there.

Tahquamenon Falls are next on our list of sights to see. These falls are located in two different areas of the state park. The Upper Falls are located in one area of the park, while the Lower Falls are 4 miles away in another area of the park. The Upper Falls were awesome! These waterfalls claimed to be the largest falls east of the Mississippi. I thought to myself that we had already seen the largest waterfalls east of the Mississippi. Whitewater Falls, in South Carolina, also claim to be the largest waterfalls east of the Mississippi. Come to find out, Tahquamenon Falls are the largest falls by volume whereas the Whitewater Falls are the largest waterfalls in height east of the Mississippi.



Tahquamenon's Lower Falls consist of several small cascading waterfalls. You could actually rent a boat here and row out to the falls. Plus, there were several walkways available for viewing. We enjoyed walking around this area. It was a chance to stretch our legs and great exercise. Plus, it was an opportunity to observe some more of the Lake Superior area's natural beauty.

This completed our Lake Superior Circle Tour. The ride home was a time to talk about the wonderful sights we had seen over the past week. It was a fantastic ride that we both would highly recommend to everyone. After traveling all over the U.S. on our Gold Wing, the Lake Superior area is definitely "Second to None!"



Story by Mark Campbell

Resources Used to Plan Our Trip

Lake Superior (The Ultimate Guide to the Region) by Hugh E. Bishop
ISBN: 0-942235-66-5

Great Lakes Lighthouse (American and Canadian) by Wes Oleszewski
ISBN: 0-932212-98-0

Off the Beaten Path (Michigan) by Jim DuFresne
ISBN: 0-7627-3527-9

The Motorcycle Tourer's Forum: <http://www.mctourer.com/>

<http://lakesuperior.com/>