

Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan

Michigan is one of the few states that Karen and I have yet to visit on our Gold Wing. Instead of just crossing into the state and checking it off our list, we wanted to make the visit much more significant. We've both have visited various southern parts of Michigan in the past, but neither one of us had been to the U.P. (Upper Peninsula). By visiting the U.P., we would cross over the Mackinac Bridge, one of the longest suspension bridges in the world. Plus, Sault Sainte Marie, located at the U.S./Canadian border, is where the Soo Locks are located. This was another attraction that we wanted to see.

Our route would be to take I-75 north to the Canadian border. Luckily, a co-worker's parents were just up that way. He said his parents ran into a lot of construction traffic in southern Michigan on I-75. With that said, I checked out the Michigan DOT website. Sure enough, construction on I-75 and Hwy 23 in southern Michigan was planned from June to November, 2005. The DOT recommended several alternate routes. This was valuable information for our trip. With that in mind, I rerouted our trip through Nashville, Louisville, Indianapolis and Lansing, MI. Believe it or not, it was only about a 20 mile difference from the original I-75 route with no major construction issues.

This would be a quick trip. Our plan was to leave Friday after Karen got home from work, then be back in time for work the following Wednesday. That would allow us two days to get there, one full day to spend in the Sault Sainte Marie area, and two days to ride back to Newnan, Georgia.

Friday afternoon, Karen gets home from work about 5:15 pm. She changes into her riding gear while I finish loading a few things in the trailer. We're just about ready to leave when Mark's mother calls on the phone. Mark continues preparing the bike for the trip while talking to his mother. After 30 minutes, Mom has updated Mark on current events. At no time did Mark mention the fact that we were leaving on a trip to Sault Sainte Marie, MI or that we would be traveling up I-69. (Note: You can see Mark's parent's house from I-69.)

Finally, ready to leave at 5:45 pm. The bike and trailer are pointed out the garage door and it's pouring down rain. Oh well, we're ready to ride! One of the great things about our new set of riding pants (Joe Rocket Ballistic 5.0), they are waterproof, breathable and comfortable. So, the rain was not an issue at all. But, the Atlanta traffic is terrible on Friday evenings. This evening is no different.

Once we made it through the Atlanta traffic, it was smooth sailing. From Chattanooga on, the rain was light to none. We eventually stop at the Tennessee/Kentucky state line at a Super 8 hotel for the night.

Saturday morning, we are up at 6:30 and out at the bike by 7:00 am. It's a beautiful sun shiny day, but with cooler temperatures. We ride through Kentucky into Indiana before stopping for breakfast at a Waffle Steak (a Waffle House with a different name). From there, we head north. As we approach the area where Mark's parents live, our fuel is

low. We decide that would make a great place for a comfort stop, but it would have to be quick since we have reservations in Sault Sainte Marie that evening.

What a surprise it was for Mark's Mom to see us! Initially, she thought it was Craig Moore since he had been there a few weeks earlier with Mark on both their yellow bikes. What? Craig Moore? She said "I just got off the phone with Mark and he didn't say anything about stopping by". Karen got a kick out of that! We did tell Mom that we would stop by Monday and spend the night on our way back to Georgia. She was glad we would have some time on Monday to visit.

As we started to leave, Mark's Dad pulled in the driveway. He had been out mowing around the farm on his John Deere tractor. He was shocked to see us too (though, I don't think he thought it was Craig Moore). Dad said we picked the coldest day to come. It was in the 70's the day before. Now, the temperature was in the low 50's. Fortunately, we were very comfortable in our gear. The heated jacket liners work great!

As we continue riding through Indiana and into southern Michigan, we see a lot of harvesting going on. Farmers in their combines were creating dust as they harvested soybeans and corn. Although it was a cloudy, cool day, the visibility was very good. Up to this point, the leaves on the trees were still green. We did see a few patchy spots on color along the way, but not really enough to speak of.

North of Lansing, Michigan, we get on Hwy 127. This 4-lane road was virtually traffic free, or very light by our standards. Hwy 127 took us north and eventually merged into I-75. The central and northern portions of Michigan's Lower Peninsula are wilderness type of areas. Hunting and snowmobiling are very popular in these regions during the fall and winter. At one particular stop, the gas station advertised "fresh jerky". Inside, there were several containers containing various types of jerky (beef, elk, deer, moose, turkey, etc.). This was not your typical jerky. It was thick chunks of meat, not thin slices. Plus, it was very tender and easy to chew. It was delicious! We decided to buy some of the beef and turkey for our lunch the following day as we ride along the shore of Lake Superior.

Just after sunset, we cross the Mackinac Bridge. It was a beautiful sight. This 4 lane bridge is 5 miles in length and the highway is 200 feet above the water at the highest point. It connects the Lower Peninsula to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The two outside lanes are concrete while the two inside lanes are steel grates. We had to ride in the grated lanes since there was construction conducted in the outside lanes.

From the Mackinac Bridge, Sault Sainte Marie was only a 55 mile ride. We arrived there about 8:30 pm. This was an 800 mile day. We were tired and hungry. We thought, we better stop for dinner before we go to the hotel.

Mark had heard of Antler's restaurant in Sault Sainte Marie from a co-worker. We headed there for our dinner. Antler's was a unique restaurant. The walls and ceilings were filled with various animal heads and antlers. As we were sitting there eating, loud sirens, bells and whistles would blast out. It would scare the daylights out of you. It was

a fun place to eat and the food was excellent! After dinner, we checked into the Super 8 hotel, chilled out and crashed.



Mackinac Bridge



Antler's Restaurant

Sunday morning, we were up before the sun. This was our day to spend in the area; we wanted to make the most of it. We would start off by riding around Sault Sainte Marie, then into Canada along the shore of Lake Superior. The weather channel said it was 32 degrees in Sault Sainte Marie. By the time we got ready and downtown, it was up to 37 degrees.

Since it was Sunday morning the town was still asleep. We rode down by the Saint Mary's River in Sault Sainte Marie. It was a clear sun shiny day. It was neat to see the fog rolling on top of the river. After a few Kodak moments, we were ready to continue into Canada.

There were no problems at the Canadian border check-in. We had our passports in hand as we reached the checkpoint. The Canadian official asked us how long we would be in country. We told him that we would spend the morning there riding along the lake. He gave us back our passports and waved us through.

There is also a Sault Sainte Marie on the Canadian side. It is a much larger city. 75,000 people versus the 15,000 people on the Michigan side. Once we were out of town, the scenery was beautiful. The leaves were bright reds, oranges and greens. The countryside was rugged and rolling. We rode for quite a while along the lake. We could not believe how clear the water was, crystal clear. We saw several areas with picnic table's right beside the water, so we stopped and ate breakfast. Our breakfast consisted of the jerky that we bought the day before, plus, some cheese sticks and drinks we had brought from home. Way down the beach, we could see another couple. Besides that, no one else was around.



Lake Superior Picnic



From a 50 foot overlook, you can still see the bottom of the lake.



The leaves had beautiful color.

We decide to head back to the Michigan side and check out the Soo Locks. The St. Mary's river connects Lake Superior to Lake Huron. Lake Superior is 21 foot higher than Lake Huron, so the locks are required to raise or lower ships and boats to the necessary level.



Going down



From the Soo Locks, we rode along Lake Superior on the Michigan side. We got to see a couple of beautiful lighthouses.



Iroquois Point Light



Whitefish Point Light

By now the sun is setting, so we head back to the hotel and crash for the evening.

Monday morning, we get an early start. Today, its 30 degrees as we head south on I-75. We decide to stop at Mackinaw City for breakfast. We remember a small park on the north side of the Mackinac Bridge, so we stop for a few pictures.



Mackinac Bridge (north looking south and south looking north)



We spend a few hours looking around Mackinaw City before we get back on the bike. We arrive at Mark's parents around 4:30 that afternoon. We enjoy visiting with them that evening before heading back to Georgia on Tuesday (650 miles).

On Tuesday, we get an early start. It would be a 10 hour ride to Newnan and we wanted to get back home at a descent hour since we would be returning to work the following day. South of Nashville, the temperatures warmed up into the 80's. The trip back home was uneventful until we got back into the Atlanta traffic. On the south end of the connector, there was a car stalled in right lane. Just down from the stalled vehicle, a bed mattress was in the middle of second lane from the right.

Before this trip, we never really thought much of the Great Lakes region. We enjoyed it so much that we would like to spend a week circling Lake Superior. Both of us would highly recommend it to anyone.

Lessons Learned:

- Check DOT websites to avoid construction/traffic issues.
- Breathable, waterproof riding pants are great for all kinds of weather.
- With electric clothing, 30 temperatures are no problem on a motorcycle.
- Research the area prior to arriving there. You'll get more out of your time there.
- Snack items and drinks are convenient for long distance traveling.
- Stop and visit your parents when riding close by. They do appreciate it.
- Traffic doesn't get much worse than Atlanta!