

The Great Lakes



September 2001

Great Lakes, September, 2001

Monday September 24

Left home (after mail came) shortly after 1:30pm. Had late lunch in Vandalia and then drove straight to Courtyard in Ann Arbor. Arrived about six and relaxed until dinner at local Olive Garden.

Weather cool (mid-fifties) and on-and-of drizzle.

Drove 220 miles today.

Tuesday September 25

Had breakfast at hotel and left about 10am. Weather drizzly and cool (low to mid 40s all day!), Drove north on Rte 23 through Flint and decided to stay with this road along Lake Huron, rather than straight up I75.

Had lunch at a McDonald's in Au Gres and got chatting with an old man who had retired 14 years ago after 50 years in the auto industry with Kaiser, Chrysler and Ford. Interesting to listen to as he talked about his home in suburban Detroit, his house on Lake Huron and his camper trailer, which he took to Alaska recently.

Then continued alongside the lake;
often right on the shore.

Pity the weather was now heavier rain,
but still a pretty drive.



Decided to stay overnight at Alpena, where we checked in to the Holiday Inn about 5pm.

Had dinner at Anchorage restaurant in hotel.

Drove 235 miles today.

Wednesday September 26

Breakfast at hotel and on the road by 9:45. Still raining but it tapered off as we drove west and north along Lake Huron. Road ran alongside of lake for many miles.

Drove straight through Mackinaw City and St Ignace (very quiet) and stopped for lunch in Sault Ste Marie, Michigan. Then spent an hour and a half at the Soo Locks - saw one large ship pass through upbound.



Next we drove over bridge to Canada (no significant delay) and stopped at railroad station to book for tomorrow's ride to Agawa Canyon. Unfortunately, the dome observation cars were fully booked but we got two coach seats.

Took a short drive to edge of town to a restaurant that advertised afternoon tea - but it was closed. May try for dinner tomorrow; tonight we are going to the Italian one attached to the hotel. Hotel we are staying at is the Quality Inn, right across from the railway station.

Very nice meal (Walleye) in the Gran Festa.

Drove 160 miles today.

Thursday September 27

Up just before seven to get across the street to catch the Algoma Central Railroad train to the Agawa river Canyon.



This is a 114 mile journey north into the wilderness, through forests and into the Agawa canyon.

The weather started out overcast but dry and gradually improved as the day progressed. The track snaked through the beautiful fall colors and rose to a height of 1600 feet before dropping steeply through 500 feet in the last twelve miles to the river level. We crossed several spectacular trestles and alongside several lakes. We also enjoyed a full breakfast in the dining car.

Once at the canyon, we took a one hour walk along well kept trails to view the Bridal Falls and the Black Beaver Falls. By now the weather was beautiful; sunny and clear blue skies-

Back at the train we had a nice lunch in the dining car, before returning to our seats for the 3 1/2 hour return journey. The train had 21 cars plus the two dome observation cars and was pulled by three F9 diesel engines.

We were delayed about an hour on the return journey as one of the coaches developed a sticking brake. We stopped twice for attempted repairs and finally a third time to (quite efficiently) remove it from the middle of the train and leave it in a siding. Weather remained fine with sunny skies and some high white clouds. Back at hotel, we relaxed and cleaned up before driving to dinner at Adolfo's. Excellent meal (best this trip so far) and bill was only \$60 (US), including bottle of wine and tip. Drove 7 miles today and travelled 228 miles by train!

Friday September 28

Checked out about 9:30 after breakfast in hotel. Stopped first at the Ontario Tourism Office in SSM where we got lots of good information on the places we'll see on the way to Thunder Bay. Weather was beautiful; clear blue skies but cool.

We then drove NW on Rte 17 which occasionally ran right alongside Lake Superior, with some beautiful coves and bays.



We stopped in Wawa for coffee and a donut and for a look at the world's biggest Canada Goose statue; Wawa is an Ojibwa Indian word meaning Wild Goose. The road then cut inland and climbed significantly. The trees turned from the spectacular colors near the lake to almost exclusively evergreen at the higher elevations. The rocks were also multi-colored and huge. We stopped at a roadside picnic area for lunch before continuing on to Marathon, where we decided on a Best Western for the night; checked in about 4pm. Had quite a good meal (Italian again) in hotel restaurant. Chatted with a man from Barbados who was moving to start work with his brother in Toronto after 17 years in Victoria, BC. Back to room by 9pm. Drove 261 miles today.

Saturday September 29.

Had continental breakfast in hotel and checked out soon after 9:30.. Weather cool and quite cloudy to start as we headed west on Rte 17. Much like yesterday, we were alternately in forest (now primarily yellows of the silver birch) or driving along the water's edge with spectacular views out into the lake with its many islands. We stopped in Nipigon for coffee and donut and briefly in Red Rock to view the lake.



We stopped at a roadside park for picnic lunch. By now the skies had cleared and brilliant blue, although still only about 60. We had another brief stop at the Terry Fox monument just outside Thunder Bay. We checked into the Prince Arthur hotel with a great view over the lake.



Had a quick look around local shopping center and then cleaned up for dinner. Had a super meal (best so far) at Bistro One just about 1/2 mile from the hotel. Excellent Alberta steak.
Drove 201 miles today.

Sunday September 30.

Had breakfast in hotel and checked out by 9:45. Weather was drizzly and cool and we drove straight to the US border - only about 35 miles. Easy crossing (no line at all) and we stopped for a few minutes at the border shop; nothing of interest.

We then drove to the Grand Portage national monument. This is a reconstruction of a late 1700's world famous trading post owned by the North West company, which was founded by several Scottish merchants. This was at a key portage point between the Great Lakes and the rivers to the Northwest. Apparently this was bigger than the Hudson Bay Company and did not trade directly with the natives but used voyageurs to bring European goods to the mid-summer Rendezvous here, where it was traded for furs, etc. The traders (rather than the owners) dealt with the Indians and apparently did exceptionally well with the owners getting over \$1M each in a single year. When the US tried to impose a 30% tax, the base moved across the border to Fort Washington (Thunder Bay) but did not do as well and folded by 1820. A very interesting stop.



We stopped at a roadside picnic stop for lunch and then went to Palisades Rock, a 350 feet sheer drop to the lake. After another brief stop at a roadside gift shop we visited Split Rock lighthouse. This was built after a 30 shipwreck season in 1905 and was operated from 1910 until it was de-commissioned in 1969. Very interesting video on how it was built and operated. By now the weather was clear and sunny and the temperature had risen to about 70.

We drove on to Duluth and checked in at a Best Western overlooking the lake about 6:30 (Eastern, although we are now in the CTZ).
Heard about Dood's latest problems and spent quite some time on the phone before having a decent dinner at Blackwoods, just across the road from the hotel.
Drove 191 miles today

Monday October 1

Had continental breakfast in hotel and checked out about 9:45. Weather beautiful; sunny and clear blue skies; temperature higher than of late.

Drove downtown to waterfront area and the main entrance to the harbor. We walked around the area (converted warehouses, etc), had a cuppa and then spent an hour in the Army Corps of Engineers Visitor Center. Lots of information on the lakes, ships and navigation as well as on the harbor and the "anvil" road bridge across the canal. We saw it raised for a pleasure craft to enter.



Then we drove across the interstate harbor bridge to Superior and then along the lake shore along a small peninsula in Wisconsin. By now the temperature was in the 70's as we stopped at a roadside picnic area right alongside the lake. The colors on this stretch were absolutely fantastic.



We drove round the top of the peninsula in sight of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. We re-joined US route 2 at Ashland and drove east into Michigan, stopping at every overlook and historic marker. This had been a huge iron ore area in the 1880's.

After crossing into Michigan we headed north again toward the lake and checked into a Best Western at Silver City, right on 6pm. Room with Jacuzzi overlooking the lake.

Molly made phone call to check on Dood and we ate in the hotel. Despite very slow service, the food was very good - excellent fish.

Drove 202 miles today.

Tuesday October 2

Got up a little later today and by the time we had our continental breakfast, made phone calls and checked out it was 10:15. Weather was clear and bright with high cloud, but still quite mild.

First we continued north along the lakeside up the peninsula to Houghton. The colors were fantastic - best yet and it was a beautiful day. Didn't see anything too exciting in Houghton (except the MTU buildings (mostly very modern) so we headed south along the other side of the peninsula.

We found a nice roadside stop for a picnic lunch and it also had a 20 minute trail to a very rocky river in the forest. By now the temperature was around 70 so it was a very pleasant walk.



We then continued south and east to Marquette where we had a cuppa. Then we drove south across the UP to the northern shore of Lake Michigan and checked in at a Best Western in Manistique overlooking the lake. Not much in the way of restaurants here so it may be Pizza Hut tonight. Actually, we went to the Three Mile Supper Club, at the other side of town and recommended by the hotel and we had a very good meal; excellent whitefish. The ambiance was that of a bar but the food and service were very good. When we drove home about 8pm it was raining!

Drove 263 miles today.

Wednesday October 3

Woke up about 7:30 to very loud claps of thunder. However, by the time we went to the lobby to get our breakfast it was bright and sunny with hardly any clouds. It was also mild; around 60.

Had breakfast in room and went across the road to the motel-owned beach. Nice, sandy with bonfire shell and swing chairs facing the lake.



Checked out by 9:15 and headed east on Route 2 towards the Mackinaw bridge. We stopped at several roadside rest stops and overlooks for beautiful views of the lake. We stopped in Mackinaw City for about two hours for lunch (UP pasties - just like Cornish pasties) and a walk round the shops and the waterfront area. Gorgeous views of the bridge and Mackinaw Island.



We then headed southeast on Rte 31 to Traverse City (cuppa) and then across the bottom of the peninsula to Empire and then north on the coast to Glen Arbor. Here we found a motel for the night; very secluded but not facing the lake. OK for one night. By mid afternoon it was quite overcast but still in the high 60's; very occasional light drizzle. Had another surprisingly good meal (whitefish again) at local restaurant (the Western Avenue Grill - excellent food and service. Drove 226 miles today.

Thursday October 4

Walked 100 yards to a very nice little cafe for a cooked breakfast - very good. Then we checked out (about 9:45) and headed south. Weather still very nice; blue skies with high clouds and still in the mid-50s. Our first stop was the 7.4 mile Pierce Stocking scenic drive. This is a park on the edge of Lake Michigan which has large areas of sand dunes. We made several stops in the park to take in a one hour dune walk and some spectacular views of the lake. One was an almost sheer 450 dune down to the lake which you can jump down.....and climb back up! We decided against it.



We then drove south on the coast and had a cuppa and a bun in Frankfort.

By now the weather was less sunny but still dry and mild with a stiff breeze. We followed the lakeshore as much as possible as far as Whitehall and Muskegon, stopping for a snack in the car at the edge of the lake south of Whitehall. By now it was raining and it got steadily heavier all the way to Grand Haven where we decided to stop for the night. (5pm) Phone calls, jacuzzi and rested until dinner

Went a couple of miles to the Bil Mar restaurant (recommended by hotel) located right on Lake Michigan. Had a very nice meal and got back to hotel by 9am.

Drove 204 miles today.

Friday October 5.

Had breakfast in the hotel and checked out about 9:45. Weather rainy so we headed down US31 to Holland, then on the Battle Creek (cuppa) and across into Indiana in I69. Had lunch at Bob Evans in Fort Wayne.

Still raining heavily so we kept on driving on US27 all the way to Richmond and Oxford and home.

Arrived home at 5:30, still raining heavily.

Drove 330 miles today.

Total miles for the entire trip was 2503.