



APOSTLE ISLANDS TRIP

~ JULY 1-3, 2010 ~

By: Aimee Martin

Thirteen of us headed out bright and early on Thursday morning from the small beach on the Red Cliff Marina. The majority of the group had paddled in the Apostles before, but there were a few (including me) who had not. The first thing that I noticed after hitting the water was how clear it was, something rarely seen in other Minnesota lakes. The second thing that struck me was that, although the waves did seem a bit larger than those on Calhoun, I was optimistic that I could handle them. We paddled to Basswood Island, where a sandy beach lay occupied by a few beachcombers who had staked out their ground with drinks in hand by 10:30 AM. So the group decided to paddle around the island, saw a really neat rock formation, and turned the corner...

That is when the third thing struck me hard...WAVES! I have to admit I froze up for a minute, scared and hesitant to paddle. I was unsure of how the boat would handle in these types of waters, but I was quickly forced to realize that these were real waves... silly me, I was thinking the waves on the first crossing were how it was going to be the whole time! Sensing my fear, a few of the experienced paddlers convinced me that the boat acts like a bobber and would take the waves in stride. We landed shortly thereafter on a rocky beach to have a snack break and rest stop (which I passed on), then continued on to the next hop, Hermit Island. We couldn't land on Hermit due to bear activity, which was unfortunate and led to my next learned lesson when Michelle told me it was going to be another few hours at least before we made it to our final destination. Needless to say, I hopped in the water and we moved on.



The final crossing that day seemed to slog on forever. With the destination far off in the distance and miles of open waters between us, it was difficult for me to have any sense of progress along the way. But I chatted with a few people in the group that I had not yet met and that helped to pass the time. Let me tell you, the relief I felt when landing on the shore of Stockton was amazing – I made it alive! 😊

That relief was soon overcome by annoyance, as swarms of hungry flies hoarded around the fresh meat, even biting through wetsuits. All I wanted to do was crawl in a tent and hide – unfortunately, the tents were still buried deep in the boats, so the group became a mid-afternoon snack for the flies. Our group had reserved three campsites and we were fortunate to get them next to each other and near the beach. It was a close call, but we were able to squeeze all the tents on the three small pads because a few people brought hammocks.

I was exhausted, so I set up tent, had a freeze-dried meal, begged for one of Michelle's to-die-for Monster bars, and called it an early night. Yes, the youngest on the trip was the first in bed! I slept like a log and got up the next morning, had some oatmeal, and got ready for the group trip out to Michigan Island.



The trip out to Michigan and back was the perfect length for me. On the way, we stopped on the near shore of Michigan to see an indigenous village. Then we went around the bend and landed at the lighthouse dock. Two guides on the island gave us some historical information and then we climbed up the lighthouse. The view of the islands was breathtaking, but Jeff got a little too excited by the view and happened to trip and fall over the edge....SPLAT!

The group had lunch, relaxed for a while, then split up for the return. Four of the paddlers went around Michigan Island, while the rest headed back to Stockton. Rounding the tombolo (new word in my vocabulary thanks to Peggy) on Stockton was a bit challenging, but we took it in stride and made it safely back to the campsite. The middle campsite held pasta night, and a wide assortment of pasta dishes and salad were shared and enjoyed by all.

That night, our group discussed the weather conditions for Sunday (our anticipated return date), and decided that we would re-adjourn with an updated marine forecast on Saturday morning and figure out the return to the mainland. When morning came and the forecast was looking grim for Sunday, we decided as a group that we would head back to Bayfield a day early. So we all packed up and had our loaded boats en route to the mainland by 10:30 AM. The wind was fairly strong during the return trip, and the gusts made it feel as if you were trapped in a sauna.

We hugged the shoreline to the end of Stockton, where we were forced to land on a rocky, less-than-ideal beach. A few of the more experienced paddlers helped the rest of us land and launch. The leadership displayed on the shore stood out in my mind as a quintessential "group" experience. After refueling, four people helped the rest of us, one at a time, get into our boats, get our spray skirts on whilst battling waves crashing into the cockpits, and shoved us out into the lake.

Most of us had a fair bit of water in our cockpits, so we paired up and used our bilge pumps to reduce the amount until we were in calmer waters. The teamwork was awesome and I was grateful that I was traveling with such wonderful and helpful people. We paddled over to Hermit Island, where calm waters greeted us. This was a huge relief to me, and I enjoyed every second of serenity I could. The rock formations there were beautiful and the water clear, but we only stayed a few minutes to allow everyone to get the remaining water out of their boats.



We hugged the shore of Hermit, and then crossed over to Basswood, where a nice, albeit buggy, beach welcomed us for lunch. By this time, I was getting ready to finish off the trip and get back on the mainland. We had a short lunch, and completed the last leg from Basswood back to Red Cliff. The beach and surrounding campground area was packed with people, but we managed to get our gear and boats loaded and took off back home.

All in all, this was a great first experience for me and I look forward to going back again. A special thank you to each and every one in the group for making this a memorable and enjoyable trip for me, and for helping to coach and mentor me to become a better paddler!