



PART II
GREAT LOOP
NEW YORK TO CHICAGO

The Journey Continues

The second leg of America's Great Loop offers a variety of routes and side trips

If the first leg of America's Great Loop is a fairly straightforward shot up the East Coast from Florida to New York, then the second leg is all about options. Once cruisers arrive in New York City—having completed the first part of a 5,400+ mile trip around the Eastern half of America—the next goal is Chicago, Illinois.

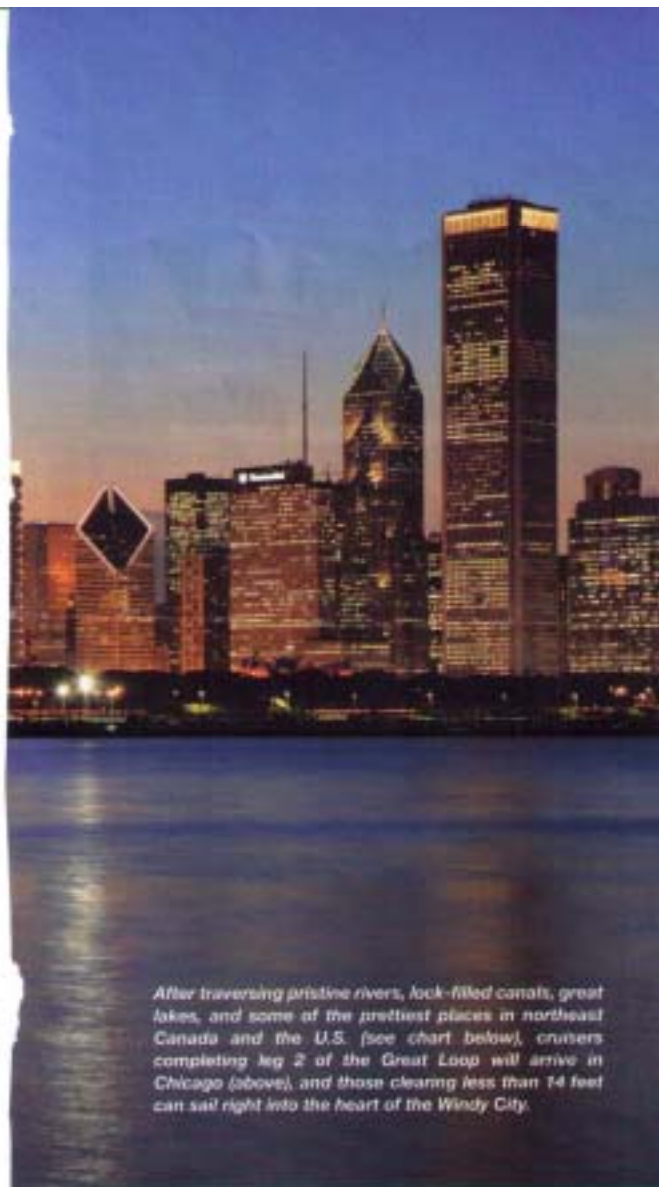
While there is one route that's the most direct between New York and Chicago, this clan of cruisers generally isn't focused on the shortest distance between two points. Quite the opposite, Loopers take pleasure in the journey as much as the destination, and many take a few years to complete the trip.

The second leg winds through America's less-traveled rivers, Canada's lock-filled canals and the majestic Great Lakes. There are three main routes that Loopers take to reach Chicago. In addition, there are countless side trips that can add days,

weeks and seasons onto a trip. Loopers are free spirits, and it only seems fitting that they should have many options.

There are a few important things that must be taken into consideration in this part of the trip, and may make the decision of "which way?" easy for some cruisers. The first is height restrictions, as some of the routes will be unusable to cruisers with high flybridges, radar arches whose height exceeds 20 feet or the rare sailor making the Loop. There are marinas along the way that will assist in lowering radar arches and stepping masts to make a route accessible. This information can be found on the America's Great Loop Cruisers' Association's (AGLCA) Web site at greatloop.org under Frequently Asked Questions. The Web site also provides a full list of height

By Russ Meritt



After traversing pristine rivers, lock-filled canals, great lakes, and some of the prettiest places in northeast Canada and the U.S. (see chart below), cruisers completing leg 2 of the Great Loop will arrive in Chicago (above), and those clearing less than 14 feet can sail right into the heart of the Windy City.

restrictions. According to the AGLCA if you can't clear 20.5 feet—or aren't able to lower your radar arch—you must leave New York Harbor and take the long way around Maine, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia down to the St. Lawrence Seaway.

Another concern is locks. Going through locks is a given on this leg of the Loop, and some of the locks in Canada are especially unusual—one puts your boat in a lift and takes it over a road, setting it back in the water on the other side. Some cruisers consider passing the locks to be a fun adventure in itself, while some transit as few as possible.

Most Loopers bound for Chicago will all start their cruise in the same manner, leaving the Big Apple and heading up the Hudson River. This route takes

cruisers past Tarrytown—made famous by Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*—his house is open to tours. After Troy and Albany, the river meets with the eastern entrance of the Erie Canal, where cruisers will make their first big decision.

There are three main routes open to Loopers on this leg:

1) The most common is to take the Erie Canal (part of the New York State Canal System) east to the Oswego Canal. Here, cruisers transit seven locks on the short Oswego Canal to exit into Lake Ontario. This route has the least height restriction, perhaps adding to its popularity—cruisers need to only be able to clear 20.5 feet. After Lake Ontario, it's north along Canada's Trent-Severn Canal—this 240 mile waterway has 44 locks, and the minimum overhead fixed bridge clearance is 22 feet. The Trent-Severn empties into Georgian Bay, a sheltered cruising ground north on Lake Huron that many Loopers say is a highlight of the trip. Continuing on from Georgian Bay, the North Channel leads down to Lake Michigan and Mackinac Island, another Looper fave. Lake Michigan presents even more options for the final jog to



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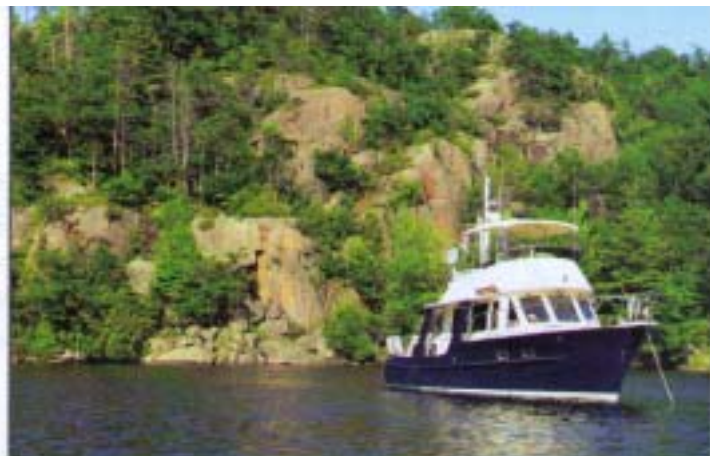


PHOTO BY BOB KUMATH

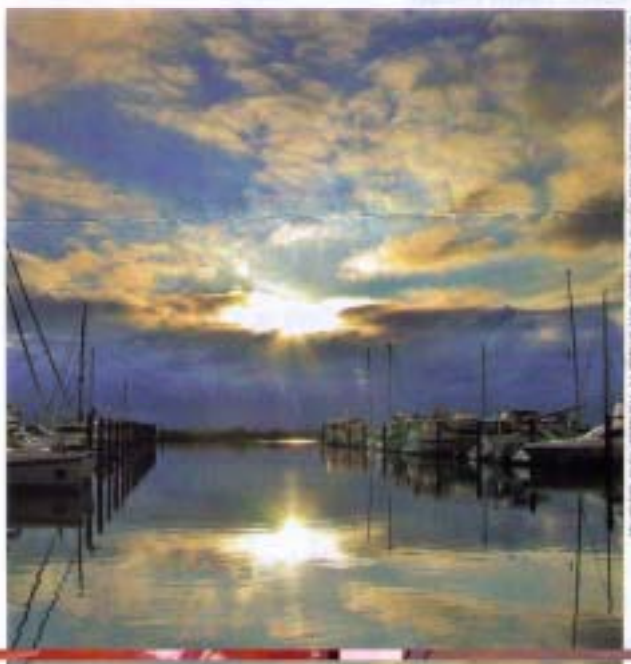


PHOTO COURTESY AMERICA'S GREAT LOOP CRUISERS ASSOCIATION



PHOTO BY BOB KUMATH

Clockwise from upper left: picturesque Georgian Bay in Lake Huron, is a Looper favorite. Almost as large as Lake Ontario, the unspoiled bay is home to literally thousands of islands; Sans Souci anchored in Morton Bay off the Rideau Canal. "The access to this beautiful fjord is through a narrow pass so tight that you are tempted to grease the hull before entering, but it's worth it if you can get inside," Bob says; an impressive wooden boat collection can be found at the Antique Boat Museum in Clayton, New York, on the St. Lawrence Seaway; daybreak over a Lake Michigan marina—this Great Lake is as cruiser-friendly as they come with many natural and man-made harbors on both shores.

Chicago, but let's take one thing at a time...

2) The second most popular route takes cruisers deeper into America's and Canada's river systems. Instead of heading East at the confluence of the Hudson River and Erie Canal, Loopers will head north along the Champlain Canal, and into Lake Champlain. This route then takes cruisers north through the Chambly Canal, Richelieu River, Saint-Ours Canal, and down the St. Lawrence River. The St. Lawrence River heads south and to Lake Ontario, where Loopers hop on the Trent-Severn Waterway and continue along option one.

3) The third option is the most direct route and, perhaps not coincidentally, also the least popular. Cruisers will take the Erie Canal all the way through—instead of exiting at Oswego and heading into Lake Ontario—straight to Lake Erie, then up through Lake Huron to Mackinac Island. This route makes it

possible to complete the Loop while never leaving America's waterways. While it might be a good option for those who are a little more pressed for time, it cuts out some of the best cruising found on leg 2 in the lakes and rivers of Canada.

Of course, each of these routes abounds with side trips. Steve Kromer, member services coordinator of the AGLCA, recommends taking time to visit the Finger Lakes in the central region of New York, which can be accessed via the Erie and Cayuga-Seneca Canals. "It's worth it to spend a whole summer here," he says. Indeed, Steve knows many cruisers who extend this leg of the Great Loop out over many years—one who even spent five years—leaving the boat for the winter and coming back each summer to explore this region. Timing is important on the second leg. It's recommended not be on the Erie Canal before mid-June, and most want to be off Lake Michigan by September.

Because of this short cruising season, it makes the decision to leave the boat and spend a few summers completing the second leg an easy one to make.

When Bob Kunath made the trip on his 38-foot Pacific Seacraft, *Sans Souci* (French for "without care"), he planned to take his time. He took two years to travel 9,580 statute miles completing the Loop, and recommends that Loopers, "Take as many side trips as you can." Bob and his wife Carol took a different route on leg 2, one that took some extra time, but was well worth it. They stuck with the gist of option 2, heading north on Champlain Canal, but instead of heading down the St. Lawrence River, they diverted onto the less-traveled Rideau Canal route. This beautiful canal is a World Heritage Site that links the city of Kingston on Lake Ontario to Ottawa, Canada. Bob said one of his favorite parts of the trip was spending Canada Day (July 1) in Ottawa. "There's nothing like being in a nation when it's celebrating its day of independence," Bob said. "And we were docked at the seawall right in front of Parliament. Try doing that in D.C. on July Fourth!"

Bob is the cruising editor for Lake Michigan for *Waterway*

Guide Great Lakes Edition, and he offers an alternative to the standard route that takes cruisers down the Michigan coast from Mackinac to Chicago. He says this route tends to be more popular because Michigan has a natural harbor, "every twenty miles or so." But he says, and Steve Kromer agrees, that the east side of the lake is prone to higher winds, while the west coast has calmer seas, which is just one reason he suggests giving the west coast and Wisconsin a try. "Manitowac, Wisconsin, has the best maritime museum on the Great Lakes. This route also has great side trips, and while it not have as many natural harbors, there are plenty of man-made marinas," Bob says. For the best of both worlds approach, he says Loopers can leave Mackinac heading down the Michigan coast then cross the lake when it's still a reasonable jump to the other side, 50 miles or so, and continue down the west coast.

Leg 2 ends much as it began—in one of America's greatest cities. Those who have height restrictions less than 14 feet can actually cruise right into Chicago, passing by sightseeing boats and waving at tourists, feeling a sense of pride that they have arrived on their own steam. ↵

Leg 2 of the Great Loop is home to many interesting locks, including the "Flight of Eight Locks" (lower left) in Ottawa, Canada, which step down from the Rideau River to the Ottawa River. Bob and Carol Kunath's Sans Souci moored in front of the Canadian Parliament building in Ottawa, Canada, on Canada Day (upper right). Mackinac Island (pronounced Mack-i-naw) in Lake Michigan is a favorite stop for Great Loop cruisers.

