

Wisconsin's Apostle Islands Extension | Trip Report | Sept 3-7, 2021 | by Dave Mehlman

Guides: Dave Mehlman and Dodie Logue with participants: Barb, Barbara, Callie, Frank, Fred, Janet, Kathleen, Rebecca, and Steve



This Wisconsin Apostle Islands tour was the very first tour of this brand-new itinerary for Naturalist Journeys! The trip was organized as a post-trip extension from the Michigan Isle Royale & Keweenaw Peninsula tour and a pre-trip extension to the Minnesota Lake Superior Shore & Boundary Waters tour. Participants from the former therefore started in Houghton, MI, and participants in the latter started in Duluth, MN.

Fri., Sep. 3 Extension Begins | Porcupine Mountains | Bayfield

The Isle Royale/Keweenaw Peninsula extension participants began the day with a fine breakfast at Suomi House in downtown, Houghton, MI. After breakfast, they loaded up into Dave's minivan and crossed over to Hancock to pick up lunch sandwiches at the Keweenaw Co-Op and then dropped Rebecca off to run an errand in town. Everyone else headed over to the Nara Nature Trail, where they walked one of the excellent boardwalks into the marsh. The group lucked onto a nice flock of migrant passerines near the shore, which included several warblers (Yellow-rumped, Chestnut-sided, Tennessee, Northern Parula, American Redstart) and a Red-eyed Vireo. A few Northern (Yellow-shafted) Flickers appeared in the dead or dying trees in the marsh and we saw Bald Eagles, which had apparently nested in the area.

After retrieving Rebecca, the Michigan headed off to the famed Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park, a vast area of primarily vehicle-free forests, lakes, and cliffs. We first stopped at the park visitor center for a brief introduction, then headed to the Lake of the Clouds parking area. We had our sandwiches there, along with a raid on the chips and snacks, and walked up to admire the incredible view from the top of the cliffs over the lake and surrounding landscape. We even spotted a pair of Trumpeter Swans with 3 cygnets sitting on the lakeshore far below, although few other birds were seen, except for a lonely Pied-billed Grebe in the lake. We proceeded from there directly to Bayfield, WI (with a break in Ashland, WI), gaining an hour along the way as we crossed into the Central time zone, and arrived at the lovely Bayfield Inn, our accommodations for the next several nights.



The Duluth contingent from Minnesota Lake Superior & Boundary Waters tour (Barb, Fred, and Janet) arrived via plane and car and were picked up by Dodie. It was 3 pm by the time we got on the road, so we were not able to make any stops along the way, as we had a two-hour drive ahead of us. But we did opt for driving along the scenic northern route and enjoyed the landscape as we got acquainted with each other during the drive. We arrived at the Bayfield Inn and got checked in around 5 pm. Rounding the group up after a short rest, we enjoyed a nice dinner in the Bayfield Inn's dining room and then a good night's sleep.

Sat., Sep. 4 Bayfield | Apostle Islands Tour

Breakfast was in the Bayfield Inn's dining room, where 2 tables were ready to go for our group (and we had the dining room pretty much to ourselves). On this day and the next several days, the waitstaff were very informative about life in Bayfield, including in the winter; a few were members of the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and lived on the nearby reservation. Our primary activity today was the 2.5 hour Apostle Islands Grand Tour, but we had time for a quick trip to the headquarters of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, located in an historic brownstone building in town, before boarding the boat. Unfortunately, the building was closed to the public due to covid, though we could pick up some literature and there was an opportunity to buy some "merch."

The Grand Tour was great fun, with most sitting on the top deck of the catamaran Archipelago. The boat captain gave a running, biologically accurate, and amusing talk during the entire ride, including pointing out Bald Eagles at various points along the way. There are 22 Apostle Islands, all but one of which are within the National Lakeshore. Though pretty spread out, the boat tour took us close to 10 of the islands, including two with historic and beautifully preserved lighthouses: the ones on Devil's and Raspberry Islands. Devil's Island is particularly interesting since it has many well-developed sea/lake/ice caves that have been carved out of the lake-facing cliffs. Many of these go way, way back in under the surface of the land and are popular destinations for kayaking and boating. Returning to Bayfield, most folks ate lunch in small groups or not at all.

In the afternoon, we drove up to the Little Sand Bay Unit of the Lakeshore to explore the old fishery there and look for some birds. Although the area was crowded (and the campground full) due to Labor Day weekend, we admired the boats and workshops of the former fishing families and spotted a few birds, including a Swainson's Thrush. After this, we proceed back to the Bayfield Fish Hatchery on the south side of town, again in search of



some birds or other wildlife. Though beautiful (and with a touch of fall), few birds were to be found, aside from White-throated and Song Sparrow and a lone Cedar Waxwing. Returning to town, we took a short break and then, with some fine advance work from Dodie, had a lovely dinner at the Copper Trout a few blocks from the Inn.

Sun., Sep. 5 Houghton Falls | Bayfield | Madeline Island

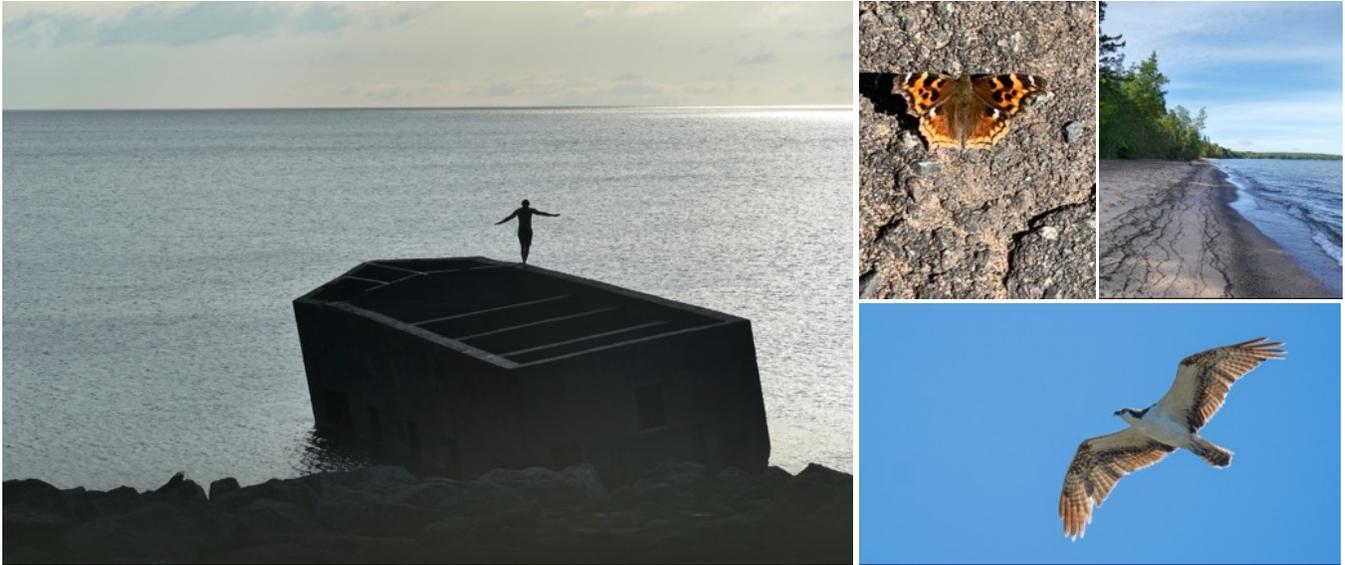
After breakfast at the Bayfield Inn, we headed south for a hike to the shoreline at the Houghton Falls Nature Preserve. Although it was a beautiful day, the dryness of the recent months was readily apparent since there was no flowing water in the beautiful stream bed, so we had to imagine what the falls were like with more (actually, any) water! Unfortunately, despite some great-looking habitat, there were again few birds to be seen, though a Common Loon was spotted out in the lake and a few folks saw some Blackpoll Warblers. On our way back to town, we stopped again at the Bayfield Fish Hatchery for a few sightings, before heading into Bayfield itself for lunch.

In the afternoon, we loaded up the vehicles and took our place in line for the car ferry to nearby Madeline Island, the largest of the Apostle's and the only one with permanent settlements (and apparently a favorite holiday weekend vacation spot for Wisconsinites!). The 25 minute ride deposited us at the ferry dock in La Pointe where we toured the Madeline Island Historical Museum to learn more about the history and settlement of the area. Following that, we drove to nearby Big Bay State Park for a walk on the very nice boardwalk trail across a bog and along some lakeshore dunes. Again, the weather was wonderful, the breeze delightful, and the company great, but few birds were to be found, in the woods or along the beach.

We concluded the day by returning to Bayfield on the next ferry and foraging for dinner. Our first try at Manypenny Bistro (named after the street it is located on) was way too crowded, so we returned to the Bayfield Inn and were able to eat after a short wait in the lounge.

Mon., Sep. 6 Wisconsin Lake Superior Shore | Duluth

We concluded our final day in Bayfield with a last breakfast at the Bayfield Inn, then packed and loaded the vehicles. Dave picked up some to-go sandwiches from the Wild by Nature Deli across the street from the hotel and we started our trip to Duluth. The first stop was the Meyers Beach Sea Cave trail, a part of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore that we had not visited yet. Starting from the parking lot, which was packed with hikers and kayakers, it is possible to hike the trail along the shoreline to a point at which you are standing



directly on top of some “sea” caves (Dave still cannot figure out why they are called that?!). Half the group made it all the way about 2 miles down the trail to see the first caves and peer down at the water below their feet and watch kayakers paddle around below—a very fun sighting for those who made it. Upon our return to the parking area, we ate the sandwiches at the picnic tables there and enjoyed a sunny day.

We then continued directly into Minnesota to the Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory on the north side of Duluth, hoping to catch the tail end of the day’s hawk migration. After arriving, Dave met the education director of Hawk Ridge (Margie Menzies) and quickly arranged a talk for the group about hawk migration and the ongoing raptor count there. It was a slow day and late in the afternoon, but we saw a few Osprey, Sharp-shinned Hawks, and some resident Turkey Vultures while we listened to Margie’s very interesting presentation (including some cool props!). Having our fill here, we then headed to downtown Duluth to check into our night’s hotel, the Hampton Inn Canal Park.

At that point, Dodie left the group to begin her return trip to Minneapolis and Mason Flint joined us to guide the upcoming Minnesota Lake Superior Shore & Boundary Waters tour. Assembling in the lobby, the group headed out to enjoy our final dinner together at the excellent (and quite interesting, food-wise) At Sarah’s Table Chester Creek Café restaurant about 20 minutes away.

Tues., Sep. 7 Departures

Today marked the official end of the Apostle Islands extension tour. Mason took several participants off for a day exploring Minnesota as part of the following tour, a few folks stayed behind in Duluth, while Dave ran errands, swapped out his minivan for a new one, and took Callie and Steve to the airport to head home. The inaugural Naturalist Journeys Wisconsin Apostle Islands tour ended.

Photo Credits: Group at Hawk Presentation (David Mehlman - DM), Lake of the Clouds (DM), Cormorant (Carolyn Wronker - CW), Tennessee Warbler (Terry Peterson), Devil’s Island Caves (CW), DI Tour (DM), Bald Eagle (Sandy Sorkin), Juvenile Eagle (CW), Kayakers (Kathleen McGinley - KM), Fish Hatchery (KM), Sunset (CW), Ferry (DM), Canal Park (CW), Compton Tortoiseshell (DM), Meyer’s Beach (CW), Osprey (Mike Boyce)