Apostle Islands

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore
Wisconsin

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



A Wild Archipelago...

Islands lend a dimension of hospitality to spectacular but daunting Lake Superior. Cloaked in a mantle of regrown forests, the Apostle Islands resonate with human stories reaching back to time immemorial.
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Archipelago . . . an island chain, complete with links to both past and present. Be wary as you submit to the islands' charms—they are surrounded by the cold, blue depths of this greatest of Great Lakes, Superior. When wind-whipped, it breeds storms as perfect as any you might expect on an inland sea.

These 22 islands are the product of geological processes operating over periods of time difficult for us to fathom. Layers of sand, gravel, and stone are chapters of a story covering thousands, millions, even billions of years. The islands' story continues to be written, as surely as sunrise follows sunset. Let sunlight and darkness cycle you back to renewal here where forests again cloak works of long-gone glaciers and other far, far older works of nature best revealed where relentless lake waves lap the shoreline rocks.

Wildlife thrives in these island sanctuaries—critical nesting and resting habitat for over 200 bird species. Hundreds of herring gulls nest on tiny Gull Island. Spring and fall, thousands of migratory birds rest for, or from, lake crossings on Outer Island. Some animals swim, and some cross the frozen lake to inhabit the islands.

Wild above, wild below, this park also provides evocative clues to domesticated pasts to pique your imagination as you enjoy superb outdoor recreation. Glimpses of past and present Great Lakes navigation and fishing appear alongside other evidence of historic lumbering, quarrying, and agriculture. Close inspection reveals the timeless stories and living influence of the Native peoples whose rich cultures emanate from this lake and these landscapes of their traditional homeland.

In 2004 Congress designated 33,350 acres of the park to be protected forever as the Gaylord Nelson Wilderness, named for Wisconsin's former governor and U.S. senator perhaps best known as the father of Earth Day. *Forever* means a long time in the Apostle Islands—as long as waves lap, rocks erode, and people value the meaning of wilderness.

Return of the Forests

Hemlock, white pine, yellow birch, and white cedar historically dominated these islands' forests. Tracts of ancient forest persist mostly in reserves near several lighthouses. Logging took much of the white pine and hemlock. White birch and sugar maple now grow in their place. Over half a century has passed since most logging ended, and the forests are in varying stages of recovery.

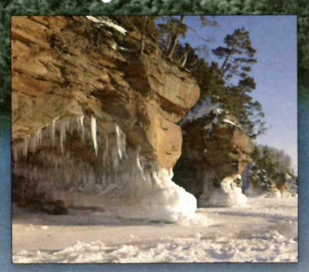
Dune Vegetation

Beaches and dunes are some of the most popular yet most fragile areas in the islands. Plants that live there play a critical role in stabilizing the shifting sands. Although adapted to survive in harsh natural conditions, dune plants are fragile and easily damaged by foot traffic.

...Formed by Ice, Wind, and Waves



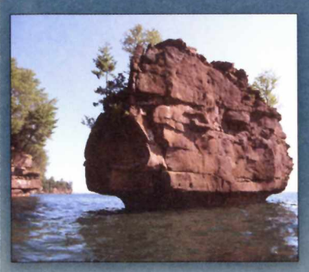
Sandstone Cliffs
Steep walls of sandstone bedrock can rise over 50 feet above the lake surface along shorelines that face the open lake.
©TOM BEAN



Sea Caves
Ice, wind, and the unrelenting lake waves dramatically carve shorelines of billion-year-old Devils Island sandstone.
©TOM ALGIRE



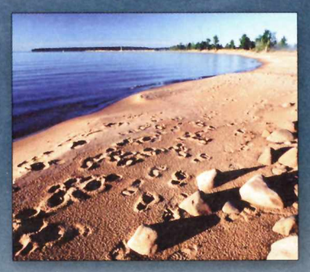
Windows and Arches
When waves, freezing, and thawing undercut rock, windows and arches may form. They will last until the rock framing them above collapses.
©TERRY SCHOENBERG



Sea Stacks
Sea stacks form when rock erodes along closely spaced joints and then is isolated from land. Over time, ice and wave action sweep them away.
©JOHN & ANN MAHAN



Cuspate Forelands
Sand deposits or embankments form small points of land projecting into the water, often crescent-shaped and as long as they are wide.
©LAYNE KENNEDY



Beaches
Sand eroded from cliffs and bluffs is deposited on gently sloping sandy shorelines that border bays, spits, and cuspate forelands.
©RICHARD HAMILTON SMITH



Bears are excellent swimmers and can be found on all of the islands.
©CORBIS

...as a Place to Nourish Life and Renew the Spirit



The Ojibwe are the most recent group of native people to live in the Apostle Islands. Their culture is inseparable from, and depends on, their relationship with the natural world.
NPS

Native Peoples and Their Culture

Imagine everything around you in these woodlands and waters as the source of your material culture—food, clothing, housing, tools, transportation, and art materials. So life has been for Native people in the Apostle Islands for thousands of years. Hundreds of years ago the Ojibwe people migrated here across the Great Lakes. They followed a traditional seasonal lifestyle of hunting, fishing, gathering berries and wild rice, and making maple sugar. From bark of the white birch they made large canoes, wigwams, and storage containers. They conducted ceremonies, played games, traded with neighbors, and told stories, traditions that continue today. The Ojibwe term for the islands, *wenabozho ominisan* (islands of wenabozho), refers to the character in the story of how these islands were created.

Today many Ojibwe people live on reservations and elsewhere in this region central to their ancestral migration. In treaties with the U.S. government the Ojibwe ceded millions of acres of land in the upper Midwest in return for annuities, permanent reservations, and the stipulation that they retain certain rights of use in the ceded territory. Two of these reservations, at Red Cliff and Bad River *(see map on the reverse)*, were established on land in the Apostle Islands area.



Island forests have now recovered from logging so much that they may seem mature and even unchanged to the untrained eye. However, logging altered the mix of trees that grow on many of these islands.
©WISCONSIN DNR ARCHIVES

Fish, Stone, and Lumber

Fishing or gathering your own food still strikes a primal chord in us. For centuries the Ojibwe have fished *Gitchigami*—big lake or Lake Superior—for lake trout, whitefish, lake herring, and sturgeon. Commercial fishing began in the 1830s, grew steadily for decades, then declined after the 1890s, recovered, and declined again in the 1950s because of over fishing, pollution, habitat destruction, and non-native, invasive species. In recent years careful management has helped fish populations rebound to sustain both commercial and sport fishing in the area.

The Great Chicago Fire of 1871 spurred demand for sandstone building material, quarried here first on Basswood and then later on Hermit and Stockton islands. Buildings of Apostle Islands brownstone were constructed in Milwaukee, Detroit, Toledo, Cincinnati, St. Paul, Kansas City, and Omaha until architectural styles changed around 1900.

Logging activity took place on almost all of the Apostle Islands between 1850 and 1970. At one point in the early 1900s, there were 100 men living in two bunkhouses on Stockton Island's Trout Point. On both Michigan and Outer islands, railroads took logs to landings for transport by water to mills. White pines went first, then the hemlocks, yellow birch, and sugar maples.



Fashions change, but outdoor recreation has beckoned people here since the 19th century. A summer Great Lakes tour was a good way to stay cool in the era before air conditioning.
NPS

Recreation and Tourism

Is your main purpose today just to relax and enjoy yourself and your companions? If so, you are indulging an Apostle Islands tradition that dates back over 150 years. Summer boat tours of the Great Lakes were already popular in the mid-1800s. Tourism boomed when the railroad reached Bayfield in 1883, and it lasted until logging's impacts had affected most of the islands and the 1930s Great Depression put a clamp on many people's pocketbooks.

Even in tourism's earliest days some people roughed it, camping out. From 1886 to 1914 Sand Island's Camp Stella provided a rustic haven for island visitors. Camp Stella's days are past, but the camping tradition is carried on today by park visitors who travel by foot, kayak, or boat.

Establishment of the national lakeshore in 1970 recognized the area's potential for water-based recreation. The rare combination of remote but accessible scenery, pristine shorelines, and open and protected waters affords unparalleled freshwater sailing, boating, and sea kayaking opportunities.

With 80 percent of the national lakeshore now protected as wilderness, opportunities for primitive recreation experiences are assured here into the indefinite future.





Raspberry Island Lighthouse



Devils Island Lighthouse



Outer Island Lighthouse



Old Michigan Island Lighthouse



New Michigan Island Lighthouse



New La Pointe Lighthouse (Long Island)

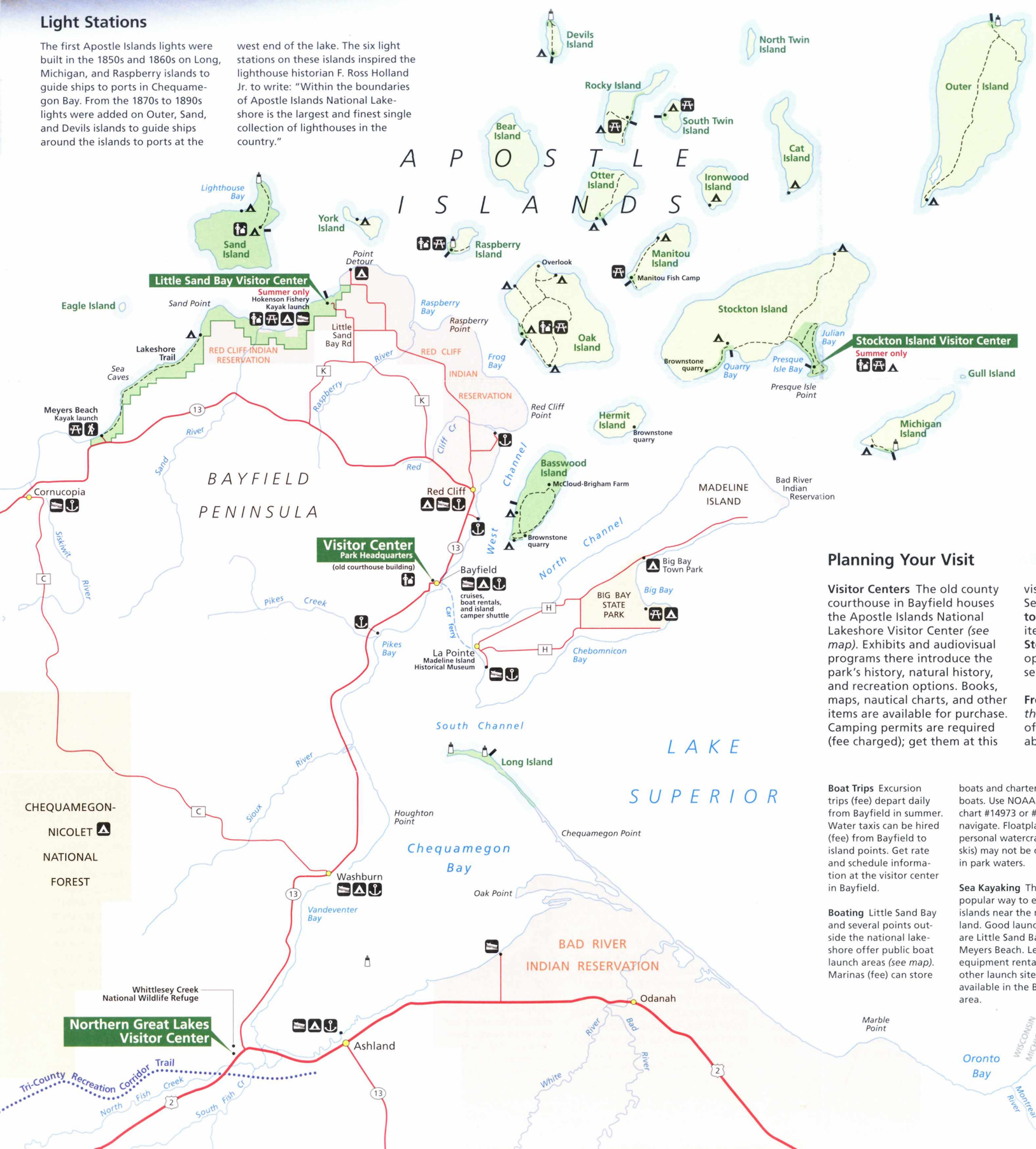


Chequamegon Point Lighthouse (Long Island)

◀Sand Island Lighthouse
©DENNIS O'HARA

Light Stations

The first Apostle Islands lights were built in the 1850s and 1860s on Long, Michigan, and Raspberry islands to guide ships to ports in Chequamegon Bay. From the 1870s to 1890s lights were added on Outer, Sand, and Devils islands to guide ships around the islands to ports at the west end of the lake. The six light stations on these islands inspired the lighthouse historian F. Ross Holland Jr. to write: "Within the boundaries of Apostle Islands National Lakeshore is the largest and finest single collection of lighthouses in the country."



Navigation to Recreation

Circumstances regularly conspire in life to cause us to wonder, "Who is the boss?" Here the answer is simple, as commercial fisherman Julian Nelson put it: "The lake is the boss. No matter how big you are or what kind of a boat you've got, the lake is still the boss. Mother Nature dictates a lot of things."

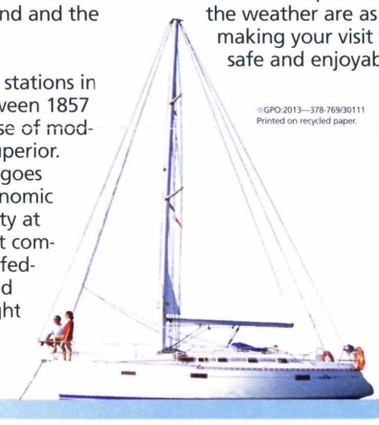
Through the centuries people have used Lake Superior as a route of travel and commerce. Ojibwe and other Indian groups navigated the lake in large birch bark canoes that voyageurs adopted for the fur trade by the mid-1600s. The 200-year fur trade was an international economic enterprise held together by birch bark, a tribute to American Indian technology. Today the Great Lakes shipping industry still links commerce between North America's heartland and the entire globe.

The building of six light stations in the Apostle Islands between 1857 and 1891 marked the rise of modern shipping on Lake Superior. With both ships and cargoes greatly increased in economic value—and human safety at issue—shippers and port communities energized the federal government to build navigation aids. That light stations attract so many visitors, not just guide ships, signals a major shift in how we value these islands today.

Now more than simply a source of raw materials, the islands are a great resource for recreation and rejuvenating human spirits. They also protect habitat for wild creatures without whom they, and we, would not be complete. Nothing so symbolized this shift in values here as the recent designation of the Gaylord Nelson Wilderness.

Although sailboats, power boats, and sea kayaks now mostly replace the schooners, freighters, and voyageurs' canoes that once plied the islands' waters, one thing remains the same . . . the lake is still the boss. Careful planning and attention to the weather are as important as ever in making your visit to the Apostle Islands safe and enjoyable.

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Planning Your Visit

Visitor Centers The old county courthouse in Bayfield houses the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore Visitor Center *(see map)*. Exhibits and audiovisual programs there introduce the park's history, natural history, and recreation options. Books, maps, nautical charts, and other items are available for purchase. Camping permits are required (fee charged); get them at this visitor center. From June to September, **Little Sand Bay Visitor Center** offers exhibits, sales items, and an information desk. **Stockton Island Visitor Center** is open daily in summer as a self-service facility.

Free Park Newspaper *Around the Archipelago* lists schedules of ranger-led programs, news about caring for the lakeshore, and vitally important safety information. Please read it and heed it.

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore is one of over 380 parks in the National Park System. The National Park Service cares for these special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage. For more information about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

More Information
Apostle Islands
National Lakeshore
415 Washington Avenue
Bayfield, WI 54814
715-779-3397
www.nps.gov/apis

Boat Trips Excursion trips (fee) depart daily from Bayfield in summer. Water taxis can be hired (fee) from Bayfield to island points. Get rate and schedule information at the visitor center in Bayfield.

Boating Little Sand Bay and several points outside the national lakeshore offer public boat launch areas *(see map)*. Marinas (fee) can store boats and charter sailboats. Use NOAA nautical chart #14973 or #14966 to navigate. Floatplanes and personal watercraft (jet skis) may not be operated in park waters.

Sea Kayaking This is a popular way to explore islands near the mainland. Good launch sites are Little Sand Bay and Meyers Beach. Lessons, equipment rentals, and other launch sites are available in the Bayfield area.

Fees A camping permit is required and a nightly fee charged. Check with the park staff or on the park website for details about this and other fees. All fee revenues will remain at Apostle Islands National Lakeshore to help maintain and to improve park resources and services.

Accommodations and Services Primitive campsites offer the national lakeshore's only overnight accommodations. The Red Cliff Reservation, state parks, and national forest lands also offer various camping opportunities. Campgrounds, motels, stores, and/or restaurants are in nearby communities.

Regulations and Safety Check the free park newspaper or at visitor centers and ranger stations for more safety tips and regulations on hunting, fishing, camping, and other forms of recreation. All federal and state boating regulations are enforced. State and federal laws prohibit pumping holding tanks or oily bilges into the lake.

WARNING: Dangerous Waters Lake Superior waters are dangerously cold, and sudden storms arise. Just offshore 50°F waters threaten hypothermia. Get weather reports from the U.S. Coast Guard in Bayfield, ranger stations, and 162.55MHz (Duluth).

North

0 5 10 Kilometers
0 5 10 Miles

Lake Superior within Apostle Islands National Lakeshore

The Apostle Islands National Lakeshore boundary extends one quarter mile into Lake Superior from the islands and the shoreline of the mainland section of the park.

Trail
Dock (symbol not to scale)
Apostle Islands National Lakeshore
Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, Gaylord Nelson Wilderness
Lighthouse
Ranger station
Picnic area
Trailhead
Marina
Boat launch
Backcountry campsite(s), National Park Service
Campground, not National Park Service