

## **Sea Kayaking In Apostle Islands National Park August 25 – 28, 2006**

### **August 25, 2006:**

I left my apartment in Spring Park, MN at about 6:00 AM with my kayak strapped on top of my Saturn station wagon. It rained most of the way to Bayfield, WI and I arrived at the Apostle Islands National Park Visitor Center in Bayfield, WI at about 11:00 AM. Daniel, Gary, and Patrick left Sanford, MI at about 1:30 AM and arrived at the Visitor Center at about 12:15 PM. They were driving Gary's Ford Explorer and pulling the kayaks on Troop 776's canoe trailer. The rain stopped just before they arrived. We ate lunch at a deli in Bayfield, WI and then drove to Meyer's Beach to check out the conditions.

There was a cold front pushing thru the area from the northwest and small craft warnings were posted for western Lake Superior thru about 4:00 PM. The surf made a day trip to the Squaw Bay Sea Caves impossible. We drove back to Little Sand Bay, unloaded the kayaks & gear, and shuttled a vehicle over the marina in Red Cliff, WI. The NOAA Marine Weather Forecast had the cold front passing thru the area followed by a big high pressure "bubble" that was going to sit over western Lake Superior for the next several days. Once the cold front passed thru, we could expect fair weather, light winds, and waves 1 ft. or less. i.e. Perfect Conditions!

By about 5:00 PM, the wind and surf had calmed down sufficiently at Little Sand Bay to make it possible to launch. The surf on the beach was still 2 – 3 ft. high. It was somewhat difficult to get away from the beach without getting swamped in the surf, especially with a fully loaded kayak. But, we all managed to get out into deeper water without incident. We paddled out to Sand Island, arriving by about 7:00 PM. Daniel, Gary, and I managed to surf our kayaks right onto the beach without incident. Patrick forgot to retract his rudder. I yelled at him that it was still down when he was about 50 ft. from shore. As Patrick was trying to retract it, he got sideways to the surf and a wave rolled him! Fortunately, we were all right there to help him. We scrambled around in the surf collecting his gear and we managed to recover everything. With everything packaged in dry bags or ZIPLOC<sup>™</sup> bags, nothing was damaged except Patrick's pride. Naturally, he had to put up with some good-natured kidding that evening about "getting spanked" by Lake Superior!

There was a choice of 3 docks to land at on Sand Island. As we were coming in from the lake; naturally, we randomly choose the furthest one from our reserved campsite. No one wanted to risk launching into that surf again, so we pulled our kayaks about ¼ mile down the beach to our campsite. The dinner I cooked that night was maple-brown sugar ham with rice, garden vegetable medley, with 3-berry cobbler for dessert. Daniel had brought along some beer! That tasted pretty good.

### **August 26, 2006:**

Saturday morning dawned cold & foggy as the remains of the cold front lingered in the area. I made breakfast burritos. Rather than try to navigate in the fog, we decided to hike 2 miles to the lighthouse at the northern tip of Sand Island. There was a park ranger giving tours of the lighthouse. We got to go up in the light tower and even out on the deck at the top of the light tower. On the hike to the lighthouse, we discovered there were sea caves on Sand Island about a mile from our campsite. So, we decided to detour over there in our kayaks to explore them. We were having such a good time that we played around much too long in these sea caves. It was about 4:00 PM by the time we started paddling toward our next reserved camp site on the northwest side of Oak Island about 8-1/2 miles away. By 6:00 PM, we had only gotten as far as the southeastern tip of York Island. It was pretty obvious we weren't going

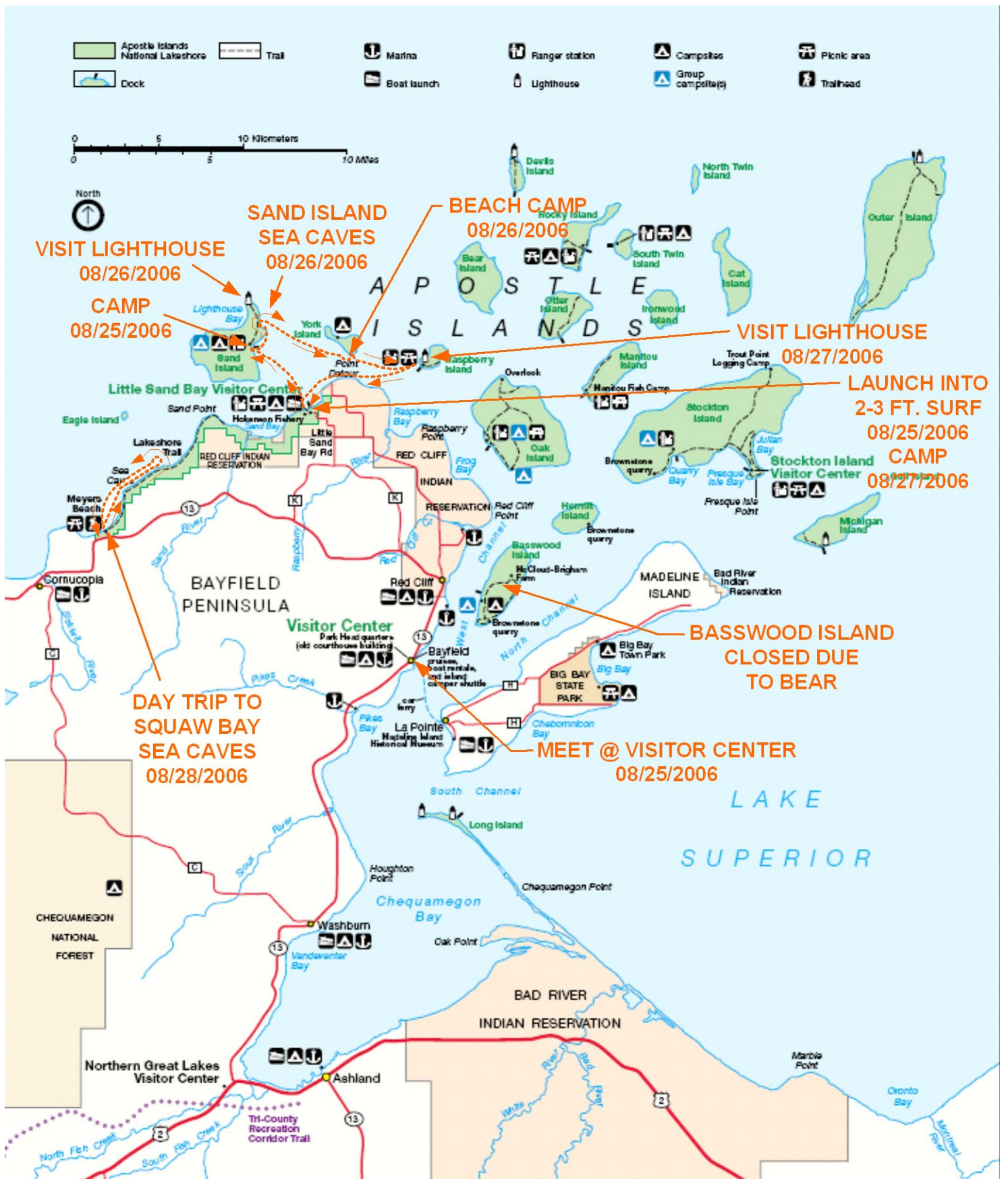


Figure 1: Map of Apostle Islands National Park

to reach Oak Island in daylight. There was a sand spit on the southeastern tip of York Island. Even though it wasn't a designated camp site, we decided it was safer to camp there vs. try to find our way thru unfamiliar waters to find a particular campsite in the dark. We practiced "Leave No Trace Camping" and you wouldn't have been able to tell we were there after we left the next morning. It was a very pretty spot and we were all alone. The sunset over Sand Island was spectacular! I cooked Patrick's favorite dish that night; chicken-broccoli alfredo, green beans almandine, chocolate raspberry cheesecake for dessert, with iced tea to wash it all down. We all slept great!

### **August 27, 2006:**

The high pressure had firmly settled into place by Saturday afternoon. On Friday and Saturday, we had all been wearing wet suits because of the 50°F water temperature and the 60°F air temperature with fog. By the time we reached York Island on Saturday evening, it was sunny and the air temperature had warmed up to about 80°F. We were all overheating in our wetsuits. Sunday morning was bright and sunny with dead calm water and not a breath of wind. All the sailboats were motoring! It was obvious we weren't going to need our wetsuits and we packed them away. In order to speed things up, we had a simple breakfast of instant oatmeal, dried apricots, and hot spiced apple cider. We paddled over to Raspberry Island and had lunch at the lighthouse. The lighthouse was closed for restoration work; but, Daniel found a way in. We looked around, being careful not to disturb anything.

The original trip itinerary had us camping on Oak Island, then Basswood Island, and finally coming ashore at Red Cliff Marina. However, the Park Service had to close Basswood Island to all visitors due to some problems with a bear. Without an intermediate campsite on Basswood Island, we would have had to paddle about 8 miles from Oak Island to our take-out point in Red Cliff. On this kind of trip, Mother Nature is in control and your travel plans have to be flexible. Since the fair weather was firmly in place, we decided it was preferable to visit the Squaw Bay Sea Caves on Monday vs. paddle all those miles. So, after lunch, we paddled back to Little Sand Bay and camped there. My Saturn station wagon was parked at Little Sand Bay. While Gary and I drove over to Red Cliff Marina to recover his Ford Explorer and the trailer, Daniel and Patrick unloaded the kayaks. For dinner that night, I made roast beef, garlic mashed potatoes with gravy, peas and carrots, and tropical punch. We all got to take showers. The sunset was gorgeous. Ah, life is good!

### **August 28, 2006:**

Our final day in the Apostle Islands was a perfect day for exploring sea caves; partly cloudy with a little haze, calm wind, calm sea, and an afternoon temperature about 80°F. I made pancakes and bacon for breakfast.

After breakfast, we broke camp and drove over to Meyer's Beach. The kayaks were noticeably easier to paddle without all the camping gear and we traveled the 1 mile from the launch site to the start of the sea caves much faster than in previous days. The sea caves were absolutely spectacular! I'll let the pictures do the talking.

Too soon, we had to turn back. We were out of the water at Meyer's Beach by about 3:30 PM and ready to roll down the road by about 4:15 PM. We drove back to Bayfield, WI and had dinner at a nice restaurant overlooking the marina. We all toasted a safe, fantastically successful, sea kayak trip. I left about 5:30 PM and was back at my apartment by 10:00 PM. The boys got back to Sanford, MI about 4:30 AM the next day.