



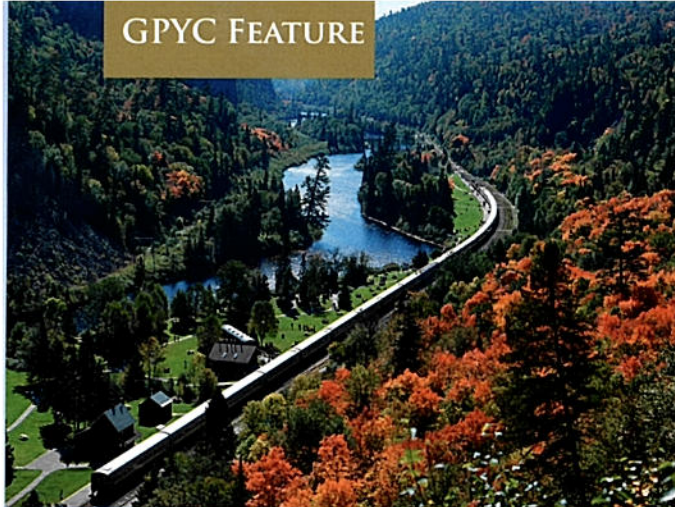
THE NORTH CH



ANNEL *from a different perspective*

BY LARRY AND CAROL STEPHENSON

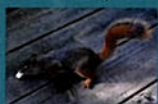




Canada's North Channel and Georgian Bay have always been premier destinations for GPYC boaters. The beauty is legendary, and so are the hazards. Does anyone know a Georgian Bay cruiser without a "rock" story?

There is another way to experience at least some of that beauty without dinging your prop – you can travel by car. On an overcast Saturday morning in mid-September, we threw our golf clubs and plenty of warm clothes into the car and headed north with Past Com. Jim and Marney Ramsey: destination, Drummond Island.

As always, there was construction on "Mighty Mac," but we breezed right through. On the St. Mary's River, at the Detour ferry crossing to the island, we were treated to the sight of two, 1,000-foot freighters passing before us, as if in review, the *Indiana Harbor* up bound, and the *James R. Barker* down bound. This was a special treat for Jim and Larry, as they had sailed on the *Barker* for six days a few years back.



Having rented a private home at the Drummond Island Resort, we settled in as quickly as possible and proceeded on out to the deck with our docking drinks. Marney immediately made a new friend, "Nutsie," a squirrel she had eating out of her hand in no time. The evening was capped by a delicious dinner in the resort's beautiful Bayside Dining Room overlooking the water. The next day, golf at The Rock was made possible by a moderate temperature and lack of rain. The course was in excellent shape, with the leaves just beginning to turn. After one more night on the island, we again headed north, to "the Soo," Sault Ste. Marie.

The Ojibway Hotel overlooks the Soo locks, through which every boat traveling between Lake Superior and the lower Great Lakes must traverse, and that of course is where we stayed. Through the large windows of the hotel dining room that evening, we could see lights from freighters slowly and silently passing through the locks.

The next morning we crossed into Canada for a day of sightseeing on the Agawa Canyon Tour Train. The train makes its way north, roughly following the shoreline of Lake Superior, passing several inland lakes and rivers, with occasional sightings of the big lake itself. The scenery was gorgeous. That evening, back in the Soo, we were once again happily surprised with the sighting of another 1,000-foot freighter on which the gentlemen had been privileged to sail, the *Stewart J. Cort*.

Our journey to Manitoulin Island began the next morning, as we crossed the bridge again into Canada. The route took us along the north shore of the North Channel, and from time to time we could see the water, but at that point it was hard to imagine there was anything special about it unless you had seen it by boat. But once we had crossed the bridge onto Manitoulin at Little Current, it was a different story. All of a sudden, there on land, were the familiar rock formations that boaters come from everywhere to see on the water. Manitoulin Island is the largest fresh-water island on Earth, measuring almost eighty miles long and over twenty-five miles wide in some areas. We regretted that there was no time to extensively tour the island, as we were scheduled to board the ferry the next morning to Tobermory, so we proceeded on to our overnight destination in South Baymouth.

After a hearty breakfast at Carol and Earl's, a local diner that was so "down home" it didn't accept credit cards, we lined up for the *Chi-Cheemaun*. The name is Ojibway meaning "big canoe," and at three hundred sixty-five feet long and sixty-two feet wide, with a draft of thirteen feet, the *Chi-Cheemaun* is the largest Canadian car and passenger ferry on the Great Lakes. Her cruising speed is sixteen knots and she can carry up to one hundred forty cars and six hundred thirty-eight passengers. She was built in the nearby town of Collingwood on the south side of Georgian Bay in 1974. There are two passenger decks with a cafeteria, boutique, full service bar, and plenty of seating and tables. The *Chi-Cheemaun*



runs from the beginning of May to around the middle of October. By linking Manitoulin Island with Tobermory, she can provide a valuable shortcut for people traveling on the Trans Canadian Highway to cities such as London, Sarnia, Windsor and Detroit by eliminating the need to drive an extra two hundred miles around Georgian Bay.

Our three-hour trip on the *Chi-Cheemaun* was just what every boat trip should be – pleasant and uneventful. Had the waters of Lake Huron been rough that day, the ship could have employed its nine-foot stabilizers, one on each side, to smooth our ride. After settling into our motel overlooking “Little Tub,” the harbor at the center of town, we drove over to “Big Tub,” a larger harbor in a forested area, with a picturesque lighthouse at its entrance. Later we strolled through the quaint little town and ended the day with dinner and a sunset view on the water.

The next day was another opportunity for golf at the local nine-hole course, which becomes an eighteen-hole course when you play it the second time from a different set of tees. Later we visited the Welcome Center in the Bruce Peninsula National Park, where there was a small museum and a very enjoyable art exhibit. Nearby was a sixty-six-foot lookout tower that only Larry chose to climb, from which he assured us one could see for miles out into the bay and down the peninsula.

Our final day began with breakfast overlooking the harbor. As we pulled onto Route 6 heading south, it is necessary to digress here for a moment and return to the day of our arrival in Tobermory. Readers may remember past articles written by Jim dealing with the frustrations and vagaries of applying for and using a Nexus card: “Getting to Know Your Nexus Card” and “Nexus Perplexus.” Well, as our intrepid Nexus reporter unpacked his bags that day, frustration turned to horror as he realized that the leather folder containing his and Marney’s Nexus cards was missing. Did we mention their passports were in the folder as well?

The Canadian police took the necessary information, and with what seemed to be an admirably high regard for their citizenry, assured the Ramseys that someone would most likely be returning their documents at any moment. Not so much. So, as we left town for home on that last day, we arranged to meet a very nice young policeman on the road, who took some further information and assured the Ramseys that the report they filed would be on record at the border and they should have no trouble getting back into the U.S. Right. Any boater who has dealt with “Nexus Perplexus” over the years will surely understand the colorful skepticism bouncing around the car as we pulled back onto the highway.

What can you do but go on? So away we went, to the end of the Bruce Peninsula, a right turn, and down the coast of Lake Huron to Bayfield. Rumors have swirled for years that Bayfield had suffered greatly during the economic downturn, but on this Saturday afternoon, the little town was hopping with shoppers. Apparently they weren’t taking time to eat, as we were seated immediately for lunch at the venerable Red Pump. Following a fabulous lunch and a little shopping, it was time to get back on the road to home.

As we approached the U.S. border at the Blue Water Bridge, the Ramseys took out their only remaining ID, their driver’s licenses, and prepared for the worst, but lo and behold, the crossing was a breeze. Technology carried the day; the border security agent was well aware of their misfortune and even sympathetic. Look for an article soon in *The Grosse Pointer* by your favorite Nexus reporter on how to successfully cross the border with less-than-required identification, or, if he is feeling feisty, no ID whatsoever.

What a great time we had. Fall is a wonderful time to travel, especially up north when the crowds are dissipating and the leaves are turning. Beautiful scenery, good food, great friends – who could ask for more? (Maybe some ID?)