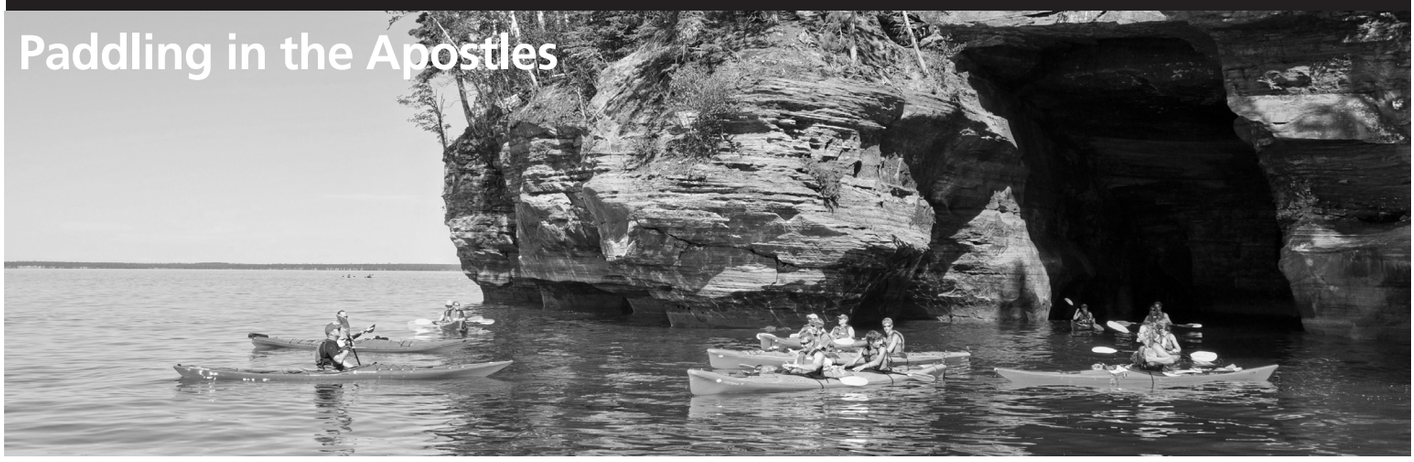
Apostle Islands

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore
Wisconsin



Paddling in the Apostles

Many people come to the Apostle Islands seeking the adventure of exploring the area by boat. Closed-cockpit craft like sea kayaks have become very popular for travel among the islands. Operating small craft on Lake Superior is fun and exciting, but can also be hazardous. Because of the lake's power and unpredictability, the National Park Service (NPS) does NOT recommend the use of small open boats, canoes, and open cockpit or sit-upon kayaks for travel between islands. This guide describes conditions that may be encountered as well as preparations paddlers should make for a trip at Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. The most important prerequisite for a safe trip is good judgment. Boaters must know their equipment, know their limits, and respect the environment.

Safety

Weather and Lake Conditions

- Lake Superior is renowned for its cold temperatures, rough seas, fog, and sudden squalls.
- Always observe and evaluate wind and wave conditions before entering the water. Monitor the nearshore and open water marine weather forecasts for the Apostle Islands area.
- Be constantly alert to changing weather and lake conditions. Extreme weather conditions may be encountered at any time. Lake conditions may become dangerous without warning.
- Average daytime high temperatures range from 60 degrees Fahrenheit in May, to the upper 70s in mid-summer, to the mid-60s in September. Average lows vary from 40 degrees in May, to the upper 50s in mid-summer, to 50 degrees in September. Average water temperatures in May and June are only in the 40s. Even in late summer, surface temperatures rarely exceed 60 degrees, except in protected bays.
- Average summer winds blow at from 5 to 20 knots with waves from 1 to 4 feet. Winds of 30 to 40 knots and 6 to 12-foot seas are possible.

Skills

- Do not exceed your skill level. If you are new to sea kayaking, it is recommended that you take a guided trip with an outfitter. Ask NPS personnel if you have questions concerning weather, safety, regulations, or destinations.
- Be capable of re-entering your kayak from the water. If re-entering is not possible, stay with the capsized boat.
- Use the buddy system. Stay together and conduct your watersports within the skill level of the group's least experienced member.

Can you get back into your kayak? In rough conditions?

Equipment

- All boaters must have a readily accessible U.S. Coast Guard approved Personal Flotation Device (PFD) for each person on board. PFDs should have reflective panels to enhance visibility at night. Paddlers should always wear a PFD.
- The NPS recommends that kayakers use wet suits or dry suits when paddling in the Apostles. This is especially important in spring and fall when the risk of hypothermia is high.
- Kayakers should also be equipped with a spray skirt, bilge pump, compass, charts, extra paddle, paddle float, tow line, and throw bag. Carry these items and know how to use them.
- The following items are also recommended for extended trips: VHF radio, cell phone, first aid kit, self-contained stove, head lamp, rain gear, waterproof matches, and dry storage containers. Prepare for possible weather delays by packing provisions for at least one extra day.
- Sea kayaks may be difficult for other boaters to see. Brightly colored boats traveling close together offer greater visibility. Paddlers should hold up and wave a paddle to become more visible, if oncoming boaters approach too closely. Exhibit a light if paddling after dark. For greatest visibility, install a kayak safety flag.
- Be sure to clean your kayak before and after using it in the lake to prevent the spread of invasive species.

Emergency Procedures

- Contact the U.S. Coast Guard or park rangers on marine channel 16 or call (715)779-3397 (park HQ) or (715)373-6120 (ambulance) or 911 and specify your location (Bayfield County).

Mileage Chart

	BAY	BAS	BN	BS	CAT	DL	DS	GUL	IRN	LNG	MAN	MB	MCH	NT	OAK	OTT	OTL	OTS	RAS	ROC	SL	SEB	STW	SPI	SQB	YORK	LSB
BAYFIELD (BAY)		4	16	14	18	22	20	20	16	6	12	25	16	22	10	14	28	24	14	18	20	20	18	15	13	16	17
BASSWOOD (BAS)	4		12	10	14	18	16	16	12	10	8	21	16	20	6	10	24	20	10	14	16	16	14	12	10	12	14
BEAR NO. END (BN)	16	12		4	10	4	2	20	8	24	8	18	22	10	10	6	20	16	6	6	12	10	6	16	14	8	10
BEAR SANDSPIT (BS)	14	10	4		10	4	4	20	8	20	4	17	18	10	6	4	16	14	4	6	10	8	6	14	12	6	8
CAT SANDSPIT (CAT)	18	14	10	10		10	10	8	2	24	8	25	12	6	12	6	10	6	12	6	20	18	6	12	12	12	18
DEVILS LIGHT (DL)	22	18	4	4	10		2	20	10	28	10	21	26	6	14	10	16	16	10	8	12	12	6	20	18	12	14
DEVILS SO. DOCK (DS)	20	16	2	4	10	2		22	8	26	10	20	26	8	12	8	16	16	10	6	14	14	6	22	18	12	14
GULL ISLAND (GUL)	20	16	20	20	8	20	22		14	22	14	32	6	16	18	16	16	6	22	16	30	28	16	6	8	26	28
IRONWOOD (IRN)	16	12	8	8	2	10	8	14		22	4	23	14	8	10	4	14	8	10	4	18	16	4	12	10	12	16
LONG ISL. DOCK (LNG)	6	10	24	20	24	28	26	22	22		18	30	18	28	14	20	40	28	18	24	28	26	26	20	18	22	26
MANITOU DOCK (MAN)	12	8	8	4	8	10	10	14	4	18		20	12	10	8	2	18	12	6	6	16	14	6	8	6	10	14
MEYERS BEACH (MB)	25	21	18	17	25	21	20	32	23	30	20		29	27	17	19	35	30	14	22	11	9	22	27	25	12	10
MICHIGAN DOCK (MCH)	16	16	22	18	12	26	26	6	14	18	12	29		20	14	14	20	10	18	18	28	26	18	4	6	22	26
NO TWIN NW SIDE (NT)	22	20	10	10	6	4	8	16	8	28	10	27	20		16	10	10	10	14	6	24	22	6	20	18	18	22
OAK DOCK (OAK)	10	6	10	6	12	14	12	18	10	14	8	17	14	16		8	24	18	4	12	10	10	10	12	10	6	10
OTTER DOCK (OTT)	14	10	6	4	6	10	8	16	4	20	2	19	14	10	8		16	12	6	4	16	14	4	10	8	10	14
OUTER LIGHT (OTL)	28	24	20	16	10	16	16	16	14	40	18	35	20	10	24	16		10	22	14	26	28	12	18	20	26	28
OUTER SANDSPIT (OTS)	24	20	16	14	4	16	16	6	8	28	12	30	10	10	18	12	10		16	12	24	22	12	10	12	20	22
RASPBERRY DOCK (RAS)	14	10	6	4	12	10	10	22	10	18	6	14	18	14	4	6	22	16		8	6	4	10	14	12	4	6
ROCKY DOCK (ROC)	18	14	6	6	4	8	6	16	4	24	6	22	18	6	12	4	14	12	8		16	14	2	14	12	12	14
SAND LIGHT (SL)	20	16	12	10	20	12	14	30	18	28	16	11	28	24	10	16	26	24	6	16		2	16	22	20	4	6
SAND EAST BAY DOCK (SEB)	20	16	10	8	18	12	14	28	16	26	14	9	26	22	10	14	28	22	6	14	2		18	20	18	4	4
SO TWIN DOCK (STW)	18	14	6	6	6	6	6	16	4	26	6	22	18	6	10	4	12	12	10	2	16	18		16	14	12	16
STOCKTON PI (SPI)	16	12	16	14	12	20	22	6	12	20	8	27	4	20	12	10	18	10	14	14	22	20	16		4	18	20
STOCKTON QB (SQB)	14	10	14	12	12	18	18	8	10	18	6	25	6	18	10	8	20	12	12	12	20	18	14	4		14	16
YORK SANDSPIT (YORK)	16	12	8	6	12	12	12	26	12	22	10	12	22	18	6	10	26	20	4	12	4	4	12	19	14		4
LITTLE SAND BAY (LSB)	18	14	10	8	18	14	14	28	16	26	14	10	26	22	10	14	28	22	6	14	6	4	16	20	16	4	

Trip Planning

Kayak launching areas are available in the lakeshore's mainland unit at Little Sand Bay and at Meyers Beach at the end of Meyers Road. Launching areas are also available in Bayfield and Red Cliff. Long term parking is available at these locations, but parking spaces fill up quickly on busy weekends. Large groups should plan to carpool when possible. Never leave valuables in your vehicle and lock it before leaving to explore the park. Leave a description of your vehicle with a park ranger before parking overnight at Little Sand Bay or Meyers Beach. A fee may be charged to launch and park at some locations. Outfitters in the Bayfield area offer sea kayak rentals, lessons, and guided trips. Call Apostle Islands National Lakeshore at (715)779-3397 or go to http://www.nps.gov/apis/parkmgmt/partners.htm for more information.

Visitors must obtain a permit to camp at any location in the national lakeshore. A camping fee is charged. The permit system allows campers to reserve campsites in advance and serves as a trip itinerary. Visitors should notify park staff in person, by radio, or by phone (if possible) when conditions force a change in their itinerary. Black bears inhabit several islands in the park. Always maintain a safe distance from bears and report any bear sightings to park staff as soon as possible. Campers must maintain a clean campsite, minimize food odors, use bearproof food storage lockers where available, or be prepared to hang food out of reach where lockers are not available. Refer to the park's most recent "Camping" brochure for more information.

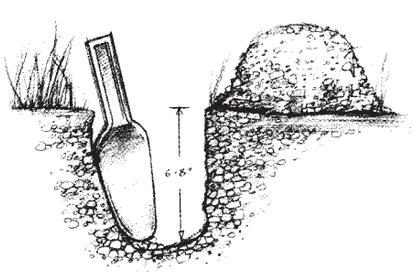
It is easy to underestimate distances between destination points. Allow plenty of time to accomplish your intended route. We suggest paddling no more than 10 miles per day for beginners or 15 miles per day for seasoned paddlers. Be sure to inform a friend or relative of your travel plans so that someone will notice if you are overdue.

Sea caves are enticing but can be very hazardous in rough seas. Rebounding waves can make boat handling nearly impossible. These shorelines offer few safe landing sites and should only be visited when conditions are calm.

Leave No Trace Outdoor Ethics

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore offers boaters the opportunity to experience and enjoy a variety of natural and cultural features. Paddlers must do their part to help protect park resources. Please follow the seven principles of "Leave No Trace" outdoor ethics:

1) Plan Ahead and Prepare
2) Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
3) Dispose of Waste Properly
4) Leave What You Find
5) Minimize Campfire Impacts
6) Respect Wildlife
7) Be Considerate of Other Visitors



Beaches are some of the park's most popular attractions. They also support fragile plant communities. Please walk near the water line or on established trails and take care not to trample beach grasses and lichen. Do not place kayaks on top of fragile vegetation. Please camp only on durable surfaces like sand, rock, or leaf litter in designated camping sites or zones. Where vault toilets are not available for human waste, dig a hole 6-8 inches deep and 200 feet from camp and the nearest water body. Cover the hole after use. Campfires are not allowed at Julian Bay beach on Stockton Island, on Raspberry Island beaches, or on any beaches within 150 feet of campsites with fire receptacles. Be prepared to pack out whatever you pack in. These Leave No Trace practices are caring activities designed to decrease the negative effects that users have on the environment.