

Apostle Islands Ice Caves FAQ's (frequently asked questions)

Updated 2-19-14

What are the Ice Caves?

There are intricately carved sea caves along the Mainland Unit of Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. As ice was forming on Lake Superior, waves splashing against the rock began to freeze on the sandstone cliff. In addition, water seeping between sandstone rock layers froze to form a variety of features similar to limestone caves. There are large icicles and formations hanging off of the cliffs, curtains and columns of ice, and abundant ice crystals.

Is the ice safe?

Ice is never considered completely safe. Ice conditions can change rapidly, so keep safety in mind at all times. Temperature, high wind speeds and direction can quickly change ice conditions. Images of the ice can be found on the Sea Caves Watch website (<http://wavesatseacaves.cce.wisc.edu/index.htm>) and satellite imagery of ice cover on Lake Superior can be found at: <http://coastwatch.glerl.noaa.gov/modis/modis.php?region=s&page=1>. For the latest information, call the Apostle Islands Ice Line at 715-779-3397 ext. 3.

How long will the ice caves be accessible?

This is impossible to predict. Wind, waves, and/or warmer temperatures will eventually break up the ice, but we don't know when that will happen. The park checks ice thickness at least once a week on the route from the parking lot to the mid-point of the caves. Make sure to call the Apostle Islands Ice Line at 715-779-3397 ext. 3 for the latest information.

Do the ice caves close?

No. Meyers Road and the parking lot do not close. However, travel to the ice caves in the dark is not recommended.

Where can I find additional information? Is the Visitor Center Open?

The Apostle Islands National Lakeshore (www.nps.gov/apis) and Bayfield Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau (www.bayfield.org) websites provide up-to-date information.

There are regular postings on the park's Facebook page

www.facebook.com/apostleislandsnationallakeshore

The Apostle Islands Visitor Center in Bayfield (415 Washington Ave.) will be open on weekends 8:00 am – 4:30 pm.

Planning Your Visit:

When should I visit?

If possible, come during the week – and carpool. The weekends, especially Saturdays, have been extremely busy with the highest numbers of visitors we've ever had to Meyers Beach - cars have been parked along Highway 13 for more than 1.5 miles in either direction, greatly increasing the round-trip distance to the caves. Keep in mind the sun sets early this time of

year (Feb. 21 – 5:43 pm; Feb. 28 – 5:53 pm) and you should give yourself 2-3 hours to get out to and enjoy the caves. This time is from the parking lot. Add additional time if you need to park along the road or on Highway 13.

If you are a photographer, the most dramatic lighting occurs late in the afternoon on sunny days. The setting sun highlights the colors of the rock and ice. Darkness descends quickly after the sun sets, so allow time to get back to your car while it is still light.

Where are the ice caves?

The ice caves are located at the western end of the Mainland Unit of Apostle Islands National Lakeshore in far northern Bayfield County in northwestern Wisconsin. There is a parking area and stairs to the beach/ice at the end of Meyers Road. The turn-off for Meyers Road is 18 miles west of Bayfield and 4 miles east of Cornucopia along Highway 13. The GPS address is: 90500 Meyers Road. See map below.

How far is it to the caves?

From the Meyers Beach parking area, the round-trip distance is 2.5 to 6 miles, depending on how far you walk along the caves. 3.5 miles is typical. Keep in mind that if you need to park along Meyers Road (which is .4 miles long) or along Highway 13, your distance will be greater. For example, if you are one mile down Highway 13 from Meyers Rd., that would increase your round-trip distance by nearly 3 miles. See map below.



- Conditions can change quickly so call the Apostle Islands Ice Line at 715-779-3397 ext. 3 for the latest information.



- The sun sets at 5:27 on February 15th. If you plan on being on the ice around this time, be prepared for dark conditions.

- The hike is at least 2 mi. round trip from the parking lot to the start of the caves which extend another 2 mi. along the shore. Factor in where you parked when calculating how long your trip will be! Depending on conditions, it can take over 25 min. to walk a mile.

BART Shuttle Information



- \$2 fee (cash only)
- Sat. Feb. 15th & Sun Feb. 16th
- 9:00AM to 6:00PM

- Pick up and drop off
- Ehler's General Store in Cornucopia
 - Field off Happy Hollow Road
 - Entrance road to Meyer's Beach

Is there a shuttle service available?

Yes. For the weekend of February 22 and 23rd, there will be two shuttle services. A BART Shuttle and Legendary Waters Shuttle. Both shuttles drop off passengers at the junction of Meyer's Road and Highway 13. There is a 0.4 mile walk from that location to the parking area stairs.

BART Shuttle (Weekends Only)

- Pick-up and drop-off locations (parking areas)
 - Field off of Happy Hollow Road (1.3 miles east of Meyers Rd.)(see map above)
 - Ehler's General Store in Cornucopia (4 miles west of Meyers Rd.)(see map)
- Pick-up and drop-off times
 - Operating hours – 9:00 am to 6:00 pm
 - Last pick-up from parking areas – 2:30 pm
 - Make sure to be off the ice by 5:30 pm – last shuttle is at 6:00 pm
- Shuttle fee - \$4 round trip
- Shuttle capacity – 27 people
- Be prepared for an extended wait on either end when demand is heavy
- NOTE – pets are NOT allowed on the shuttle

Legendary Waters Casino Shuttle (Wednesday-Sunday)

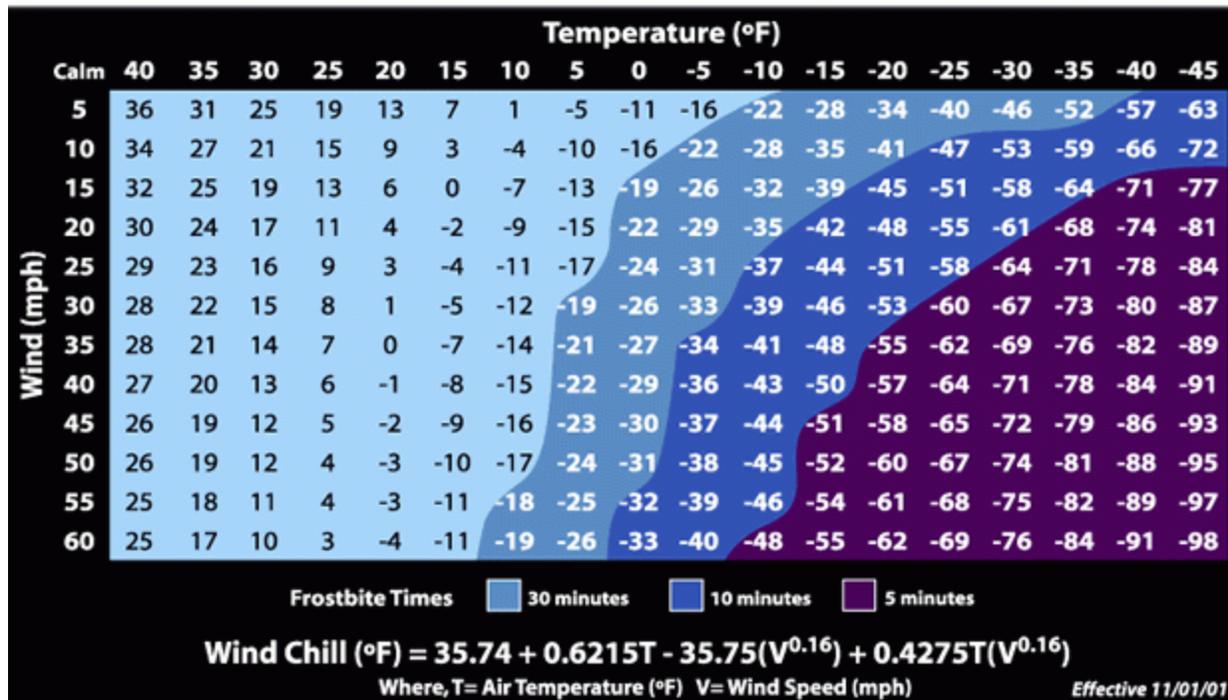
- Pick-up and drop-off location at Legendary Waters Casino (3.5 miles north of Bayfield)
- Pick-up and drop-off times
 - Operating hours – 9:00 am to 4:30 pm
 - First pick-up at casino – 9:00 am
 - Last pick-up at casino – 2:00 pm
 - Last pick-up at Meyers Road and Hwy. 13 intersection – 4:30 pm
 - Make sure to be off the ice by 4:00 pm – last shuttle is at 4:30 pm
- Shuttle fee - \$8 round trip (free parking)
- Shuttle capacity – 10 people
- Be prepared for an extended wait on either end when demand is heavy
- NOTE – pets are NOT allowed on the shuttle
- Contact info: www.legendarywaters.com or (715-779-3712)

How should I prepare for a visit to the caves?

Make sure to bundle up and dress in layers. Take something that will allow you to cover your face – a neck gaiter, balaclava, or scarf. Bring water and a snack. Pay attention to wind chill factor, (temperature and wind combined-see below). The caves are very exposed to wind, especially from the west. Spiked footwear, such as stabilicers or yaktrax, are highly recommended. The areas along the caves tend to be very icy. There is a well-worn path, but it is uneven – a ski pole for balance may be helpful. You may encounter slush or wet areas. Wear waterproof boots with non-skid soles.



NWS Windchill Chart



Should/or can I bring snowshoes or skis?

Currently snowshoes or skis are not needed as the path, although uneven, is well packed. If you prefer to use snowshoes or skis off the path, that is fine but may be harder than walking the packed trail. However, after a fresh snowfall, skis or snowshoes may work well.

Are there areas where I need to be more cautious?

- The areas along the caves tend to be very icy. Spiked footwear, such as stabilicers or yaktrax, are highly recommended.
- There are large icicles and frozen waterfalls suspended from the top of the cliffs. Do NOT stand directly under them. They might break off and come crashing down at the most inopportune moment.
- Do not crawl into small openings, the lake level can shift without warning, making it difficult to get out.
- On windy days, water may ooze through cracks between the cliff base and the lake ice. If the wind is blowing and you feel the ice on the lake rising and falling, get off the lake and return to the beach.
- The steps to the beach at the end of Meyers Road can be very slippery, even though the park staff work to keep them cleared of snow and sanded. We recommend using the handrail and extra caution on the steps.

Do you have age restrictions (recommendations) – young and old?

No, but all have to be able to endure the distance and conditions.

Any advice for bringing children?

- Pick a day with more moderate temperatures (20s or more) and no wind. Under cold conditions, especially when there's wind, frostbite can occur on exposed skin within minutes, especially with children. Be sure they are bundled up so they don't get cold.
- Consider bringing a sled so you can pull the children when they get tired.
- They may get wet, consider bringing extra clothes.
- Kids love playing on the ice, but parents need to keep things under control (don't climb on ice, crawl in small spaces, break off formations, stand under big chunks of ice, etc.).
- Keep a close eye on your children – some caves begin in one location and end in another. It is easy for parents and children to get separated.

Do cell phones work in the area of the ice caves?

Cell phone reception tends to be very poor in the Meyers Beach area.

Are there toilet facilities?

Yes, but only in the Meyers Beach parking lot. The toilet facilities are limited and there may be long lines. There are no toilets at the caves.

Are there garbage cans?

Yes, but only in the Meyers Beach parking lot. Please carry out all trash and dispose of properly – be considerate of others and do not leave trash in the caves.

Is there a place to change clothes at Meyers Beach?

Unfortunately, no.

Is there a place to stay warm/out of the weather at Meyers to wait for my friends on the ice?

No. There is a small shelter, but it is open on three sides.

Do I need to sign up for a tour?

No. Tours are not available.

Is it safe for a person to go out to the caves alone?

The ice is never considered completely safe. If you choose to go out alone, it is recommended that you go when other visitors are present and let others know your plans.

Are there going to be rangers out on the ice?

Rangers are not on the ice on any schedule, although they may be out there with school groups, the media, or to take care of serious injuries. The parking area is being staffed during peak hours on weekends to manage the crowds.

Can I? Park Regulations:

Can I bring my dog?

Yes, but it is not recommended. Dogs must be kept on a leash (6' or less) at all times and cleaned up after (doggie doo bags are available near the stairs). And please be considerate of other visitors – keep your dog under control, clean up after them, and carry out your doggie doo bags - do not leave them in the caves.

Can I bring sled dogs?

Yes. Personal sled dogs trips can be made to the caves. Commercial sled dog trips are not allowed. The same rules as regular dogs apply – clean up after your dogs. And please be considerate of other visitors. Keep in mind that there is no place to access the lake near Meyers Beach with a sled dog team.

Can I use a snowmobile, ATV or UTV?

Snowmobiles, ATVs, or UTVs may NOT be operated near the mainland sea caves or anyplace along the mainland ice from Saxine Creek to Sand Point between the shore and the park boundary ¼ mile out into the lake. This is to protect the safety and enjoyment of the thousands of visitors walking in this area. Snowmobiles, ATVs, and UTVs may be operated on the frozen surface of Lake Superior surrounding the islands and from Sand Point to the mainland unit's east boundary within the park for the purpose of ice fishing, hunting, trapping and access to non-motorized activity (e.g., hiking, camping). Snowmobiles are not permitted on the islands or off-road on the Mainland Unit.

Can I ride my bike to the caves?

No. Bicycles are not permitted off-road or on trails within the park, including the frozen surface of Lake Superior. They are permitted on roads.

Can I ride a horse to the caves?

No. Horses are not permitted on the frozen surface of Lake Superior within the boundaries of the Park.

Can I camp near the ice caves?

Yes, with a camping reservation (\$). There is a single campsite on the park's Mainland Unit, 4.5 miles east of Meyers Beach. The campsite is at the eastern end of the Mainland Trail (trailhead at Meyers Rd. parking lot), along the shoreline. You can call 715-779-3398, ext. 1 to make a reservation. Office hours are Monday-Friday, 8:00 am – 4:30 pm.

Can I ice climb?

No. Climbing, scrambling or rappelling on the cliffs or ice formations is not permitted along the mainland sea caves. The delicate nature of these formations makes them highly susceptible to damage. Also, at any given time there may be hundreds of people at the base of the cliffs. If ice or rock were to give way and fall on someone it could cause serious injury.

ISLANDS :

What islands have sea caves?

The Mainland, Sand Island and Devils Island have the most sculpted caves. The only location that is checked for ice conditions is along the Mainland sea caves.

Can I ski/snowshoe/dogsled to see sea caves on the islands?

Yes, you can ski, snowshoe or dogsled on your own, but it is at your own risk. The ice thickness is only tested near the mainland ice caves.

Can I winter camp in the park?

Yes, with a camping reservation (\$). You can call 715-779-3398, ext. 1 to make a reservation. Office hours are Monday-Friday, 8:00 am – 4:30 pm.

GENERAL INFO:

When was the last time the ice caves were accessible?

2009

How about before then?

Between 2003-2009, they were accessible for at least a short period of time each year except for 2006. Prior to this year, they weren't accessible until at least early February.

How does this year's visitation compare to other years?

It is multiples greater. As of February 18th, the visitation to the ice caves is over 60,000. In 2009, the last year with accessible ice caves, the visitation for January and February was 8,400 and in 2012, a year without accessible ice caves, visitation for January and February was 3,400.

Why is some of the ice at the sea caves blue?

Ice only appears blue when it is sufficiently consolidated that bubbles do not interfere with the passage of light. Without the scattering effect of air bubbles, light can penetrate ice undisturbed. In ice, the absorption of light at the red end of the spectrum is six times greater than at the blue end. Six feet into the ice, most of the light in the red spectrum can't be seen. A lack of reflected red wavelengths produces the color blue in the human eye.

Why is some of the ice at the sea caves pink?

The cliffs at the mainland sea caves are formed from Devils Island sandstone. The sand grains in this rock are weakly cemented and easily eroded by wind, ice, and waves. That is how the caves form, but when the reddish sand grains slough off the rock and become imbedded in the ice, the ice acquires pinkish appearance.

Have the severe cold temperatures affected ice formations?

Yes. One of the benefits of the severe cold temperatures we have had is the hoarfrost we are finding on icicles in some of the sea caves. These needle-like crystals form from direct condensation from the air at very low temperatures. The crystals have been very delicate and will not last once temperatures begin to moderate.

PARTNERS:**Are others helping with the ice cave operation?**

YES – The Town of Bell early on offered to plow Meyers Rd. and have been doing an excellent job. The Friends of the Apostle Islands, Bayfield Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Bureau, the Ashland Area Chamber of Commerce, and National Parks of Lake Superior Foundation have made financial contributions. Also the Border Patrol, Bayfield County Sheriff's Office, State Police, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, BART, and volunteers are assisting the park in trying to make your visit safe and enjoyable. The park is also getting assistance from other National Parks in the region including: St. Croix NSR, Grand Portage NM, Pictured Rocks NL, Indiana Dunes NL, and Effigy Mounds NM. We apologize if there's someone we've missed – this list changes by the day. The local community has really pulled together and many people are contributing in a variety of ways. We greatly appreciate everyone's efforts.