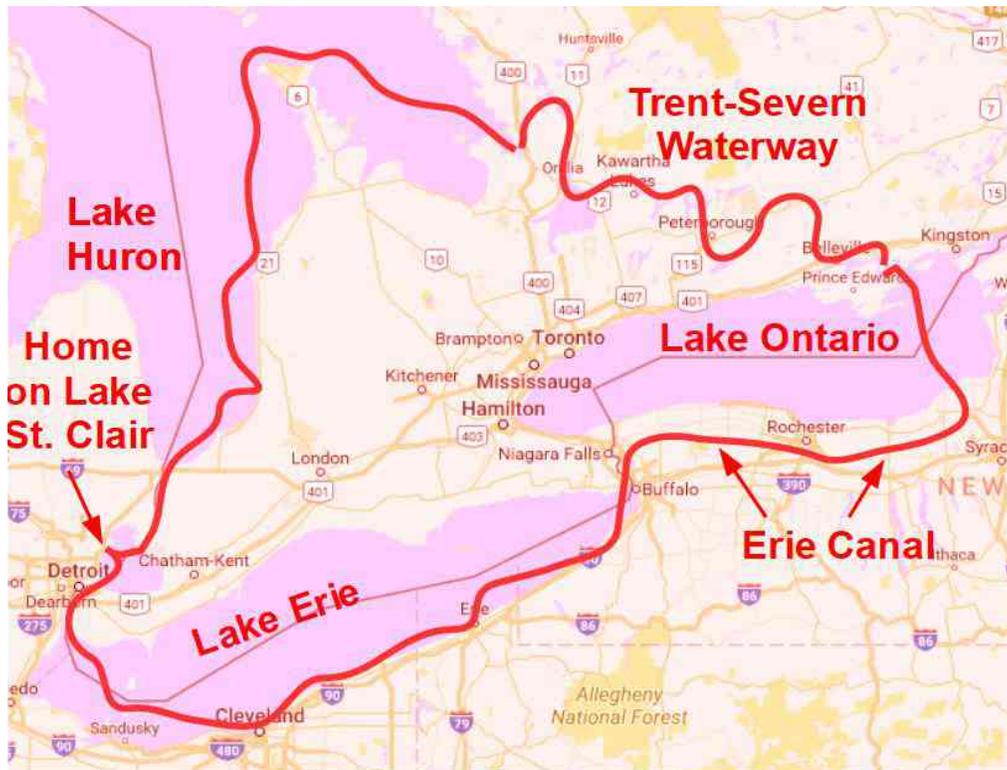


Roaming around “The Shoe Loop” Rich and Cheryll Odendahl – 2017

Cheryll and I just completed this 1240-mile, 31-day cruise aboard Roam, our 25-foot Ranger Tug. Unlike most of our previous journeys, we did not use the trailer, but rather started and finished at our home marina, behind our condo, on Lake St. Clair, in Harrison Township, Michigan.

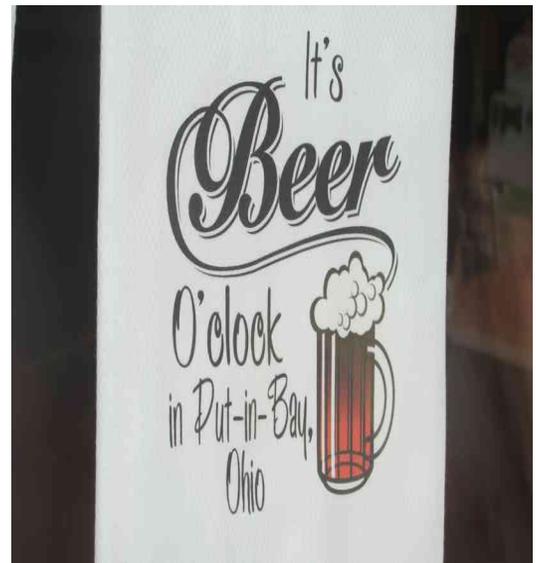


The Canadian portion of this route overlaps with America's Great Loop, but this particular voyage seems unconventional. I've been boating in Michigan for most of my life, but I've never heard of anyone completing this cruise. Someone must have done it previously, but they didn't publish anything that I found. Therefore, we are entitled to naming rights. We considered naming the route after ourselves and calling it the “Odie Loop.” We could form a society, sell memberships, burgees and t-shirts, and host an annual \$500 rendezvous. We could make a nickel-a-click from selling advertising on our website. We could plaster our name everywhere! On second thought, no, we're retired.

Instead, we hereby officially decree that henceforth and hereafter, this route shall be known to all persons as “The Shoe Loop.” SHOE can be an acronym for St. Clair-Huron-Ontario-Erie. Or, if you pretend the map is a Rorschach Chart and squint very hard, you might just see the shape of some sort of footwear. The Shoe Loop is now in the public domain, open and free to all!



Detroit looks pretty good from the river on a beautiful summer morning.



After our run down the Detroit River, our first stop was at the resort town of Put-in-Bay on South Bass Island in Lake Erie. The town caters mostly to those highly skilled in the art of alcohol consumption, but a few tourists also take in the history of the War of 1812.

Our second night was spent at the relatively quiet Kelley's Island where the highlight is to rent a golf cart to drive out to see the "World's Largest and Most Accessible Glacial Grooves." We enjoyed a restful, groovy day.



Cleveland is doing very well. The downtown is vibrant and there are lots of tourists enjoying the park and the lakefront. Sadly, over one-third of those who walked by the boat were too mesmerized by their cell phones to look up and take in the scenery. Perhaps they were addicted to Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat or texting. Maybe there was a Pokemon hiding nearby. Such a waste of time when there is so much to see.



Roam is tied up here at “Rock and Dock” adjacent to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. It's a great museum that we recommend highly.



We pulled into the shelter of Geneva State Park with the fresh Lake Erie winds blowing from astern. We were fortunate. The waves would have been miserable had we been cruising in the opposite direction. We walked to nearby Geneva-on-the-Lake. It's a very old fashioned resort with tiny cottages, antique carnival rides and arcades. Skee-Ball anyone?



We arrived in Erie, Pennsylvania just in time for Erie Days. There was a festival, concerts and this chalk art competition on the main street.



Rich's friends from school, Glenn and Daphne, and their "kids" joined us in Buffalo for a cruise down the Black Rock Canal and Niagara River to the start of the Erie Canal in Tonawanda, New York. It was fun to have a full crew helping with the lines in the lock.



Our first day on the Erie Canal was cut short by a tornado warning on the marine radio. We pulled over to the town docks in Medina, New York. This and other towns along the canal provide free docks with electricity, water, bathrooms and showers in hopes that visiting boaters will stop and patronize the local shops and restaurants. Here, we're waiting out the storm and sharing the dock with a traditionally styled canal boat available for charter by vacationers.



We took a side-trip to Seneca Falls, NY. This town served as the inspiration for Cheryl's all-time favorite Christmas movie; "It's a Wonderful Life." The town hosts a museum celebrating the movie, and this bridge is the model for the one that Jimmy Stewart tried to jump off on a Hollywood set.



192 miles east of Buffalo, the Erie canal connects to the 24-mile Oswego Canal. This is the last of seven locks as the canal opens to Lake Ontario in Oswego, NY.



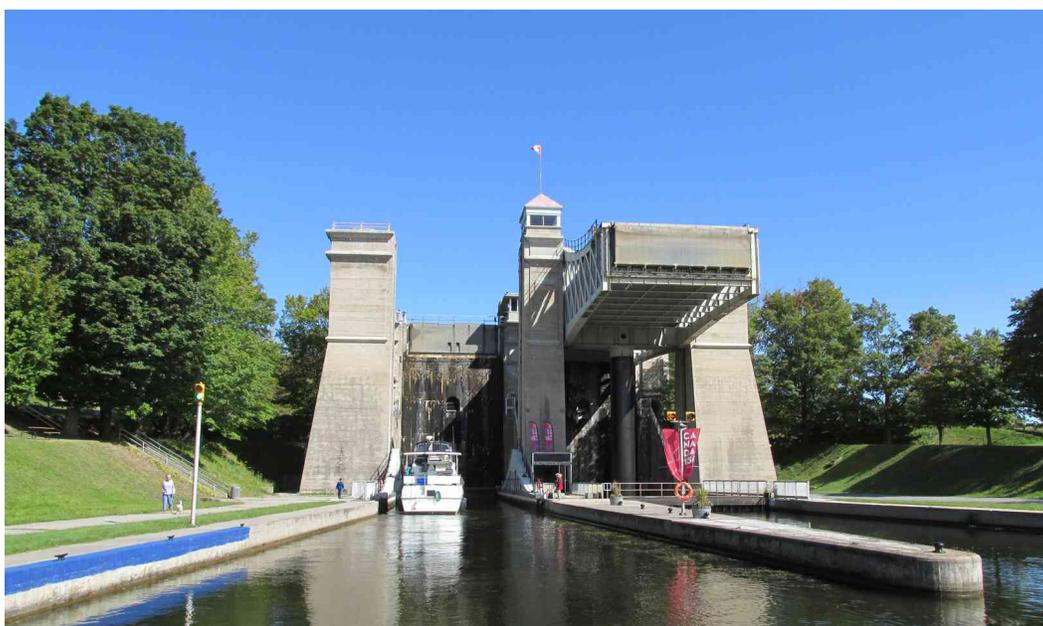
We had the winds behind us again for most of the 66-mile open-water crossing of Lake Ontario to Picton, Ontario. After checking in with Canadian Customs, Cheryl's first order of business was to provision the boat with a generous supply of butter tarts.



The next 241 miles are on the Trent-Severn Waterway. This set of canals and locks connects several lakes between Trenton, Ontario and Georgian Bay. Here, we're waiting for the water to be released from the first lock before we can enter.



Two of the 43 locks along the waterway are “lift-locks.” This one is in Peterborough, Ontario. You drive your boat into a large “bathtub” that is balanced on a huge hydraulic cylinder. A gate comes up and seals the end of the tub. The operator opens a valve and one tub goes up while the other descends. The opposite gate is open and the boats exit to the canal at the new level. These engineering marvels are over 100-years-old and still operating.



We transited most of the locks expeditiously, but here, one crew was operating two locks a mile apart. We had to wait an hour or two for our turn.



One of the “locks” on the Trent-Severn is actually a marine railway. The operator uses a system of hydraulics and straps to lift the boats out of the water for a ride down to the next lake.



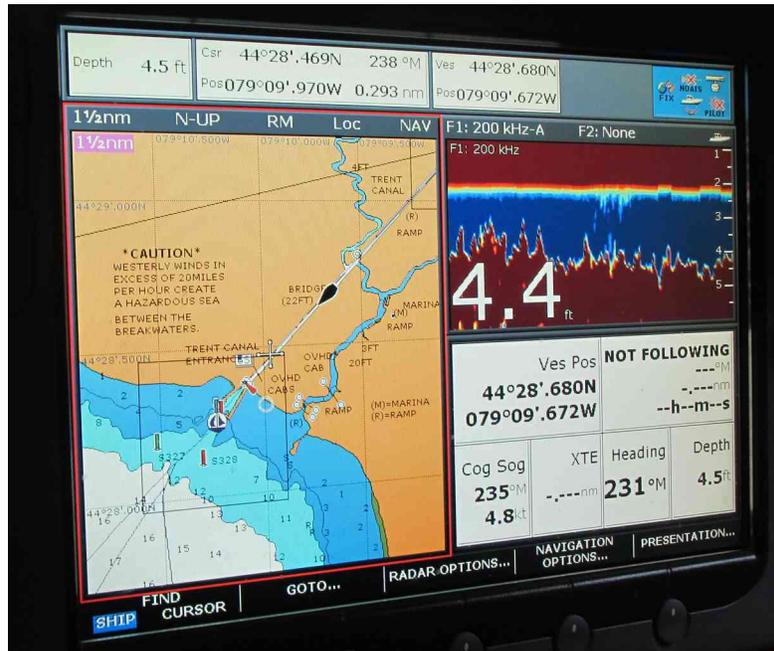
Rich drives the boat and handles the stern line in the locks.



Cheryll takes care of the bow. The bow assignment is the wet one on a rainy day.



Sailboats are rarely seen on the Trent-Severn for good reason. The advertised depth is five feet, but here Roam's depth sounder shows 4.4 feet. In one spot we saw 3.9 feet in the center of the channel. Fortunately, Roam only draws 26 inches.



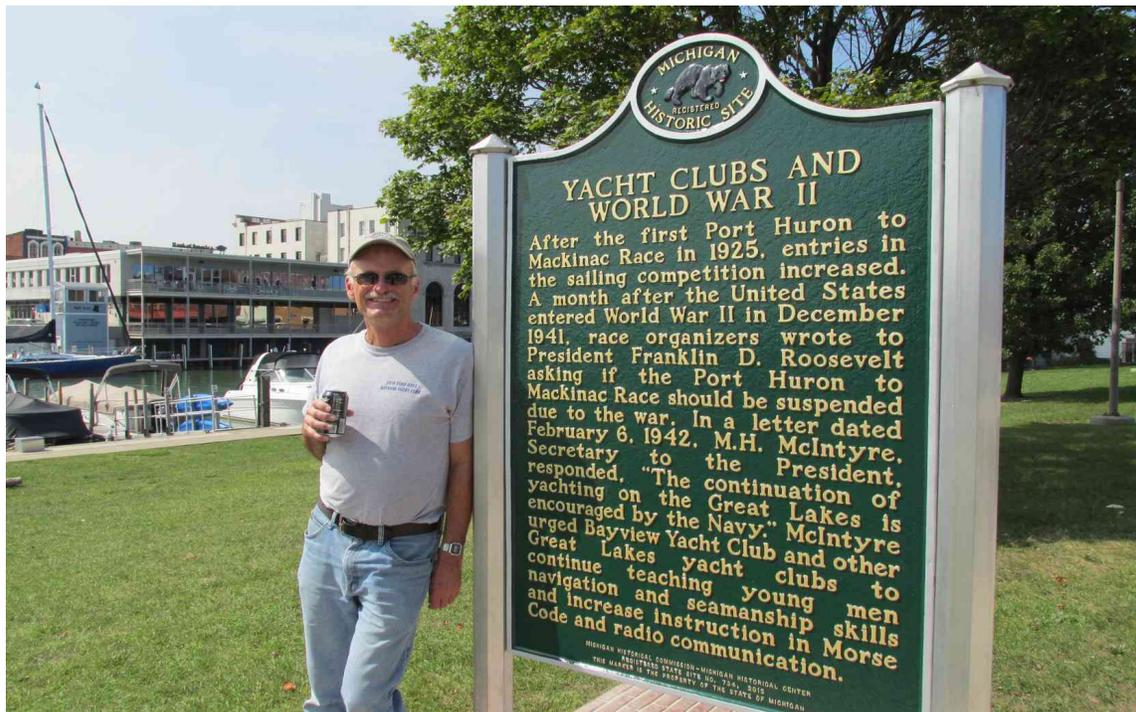
The Trent-Severn waterway ends at Georgian Bay where we've cruised extensively before. We crossed the bay during one long day. Waterspouts were in the forecast, so we waited in Tobermory for two additional days for Lake Huron to flatten out for our trip home. It cooperated nicely, and the ride south was very smooth.



We stopped in Grand Bend, where Cheryll was having flashbacks of the weekend parties of her college years in this resort town.



We checked in with US Customs in Port Huron, Michigan. Rich has sailed from here in 29 Port Huron to Mackinac races.



In this picture, we're almost home! We traveled 1240 miles over 31 days. We transited 68 locks and had 25 lift bridges raised for us. We burned 197 gallons of diesel during 159 hours of engine time. Roam averaged 6.4 statute miles per gallon and 7.8 miles per hour.



The inaugural cruise on the Shoe Loop is complete. Roam did very well requiring no significant repairs. Most importantly, Cheryll and I are still talking to each other after yet another month in close quarters.

Who will be next to take on this delightful adventure?

We don't yet know where Roam will bring us next, so stay tuned at;

<http://odendahls.com/roam/>