

# LAKE SUPERIOR Recreation

LAKE SUPERIOR MAGAZINE'S GUIDE TO BIG LAKE FUN

## Paddle On

### Kayaking on the Big Lake

Canoeing the Bois Brule River

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Lake Superior  
MAGAZINE



# At Water's Edge

## Kayaking the Lake Superior Region

Story & photos by J. Eric Eckard

**T**HE FIRST TIME I saw Lake Superior from a kayak, I was awestruck.

Sure, I had seen the Big Lake before, but always from a car or standing on the shore or even from atop a lighthouse.

Paddling down the narrow forest-lined and twisty Au Train River in Michigan's Upper Peninsula masked my view of where the river empties into the lake. Then the river gave way to a white sandy beach and to an infinity of water.

Sitting inside a small watercraft like a kayak, with a big chunk of my body below the waterline, instantly made me feel insignificant against the backdrop of Lake Superior.

That seemingly endless expanse of water, fast currents and challenging waves are among the reasons why Lake Superior is flourishing as a kayaking destination. The Big Lake also offers a variety of coastal landscapes – forested cliffsides to colorful rock wall formations to softer sandy or cobblestone beaches – that give kayakers unique, beautiful views of the shore from the water.

Lake Superior's fast-changing weather and potential for huge waves do challenge even well-seasoned kayakers, but novices need

not shy from sampling the Big Lake experience ... with the proper mindset to safety, under the right weather conditions and probably with some instruction.

Outfitters typically will help first-time kayakers with the best gear for the safest excursion. Several offer classes.

Sea kayaks, which range anywhere from 14 to 18 feet in length, are the preferred craft for big water paddling because they're more stable than other shorter, more maneuverable models. Kayaks also should have at least two bulkheads –

watertight compartments at the front and back of the boat. For unexpected flips, two sealed bulkheads will ensure that the kayak won't "needle-nose" or tip up on its end when the paddler tries to right it.

There are several methods to get your kayak upright after a spill, including the well-known Eskimo roll, in which the paddler remains inside the kayak and "rolls" the capsized back upright. The key is to practice a preferred method *before* getting far out into the water.

Kayaker meets heron on the Iron River (also called Yellow Dog River) in Michigan. Cover: At the mouth of the Au Train River as it enters Lake Superior, guide Bill Thompson chats with a state forestry service ranger.



"But you don't necessarily have to learn to roll a kayak," says Joanie McGuffin, who has been canoeing and kayaking for nearly four decades. "There are many different methods, like using a paddle float – a foam floatation device that helps you get back in the kayak. But this is where practice comes in. If you've never done this, it's not going to help you."

A resident of Goulais River, Ontario, Joanie, with her husband Gary McGuffin, has written a number of paddling books, including *Paddle Your Own Kayak* (see review page RG6). She recommends that you comfortably "wear" your kayak for better balance.

"Sit in the kayak with your feet on the foot pegs, knees slightly bent and the points of contact between your feet, knees and hips," says Joanie. "Because the temperature of the water is usually cold, it's a place to be respectful of. You should always dress for the water – don't dress for the air."

The American Canoe Association offers checklists and tips for kayakers such as always wear a life jacket, carry a flashlight and extra paddle and have a plan to get the boat upright after an unexpected flip.

Paddlers should use life jackets or "personal floatation devices" specifically for kayaks. These are less bulky than normal boating life jackets.

Another tool specific to kayaking is the paddle. Unlike for a canoe, double-bladed paddles work better with kayaks than single-bladed paddles.

Most experienced paddlers try to strike a balance between respect and excitement when venturing out on the Big Lake. But even the most skilled kayaker usually balks at taking on Lake Superior when the winds start



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The full version of this story appeared in the April/May 2010 issue of Lake Superior Magazine.