

Lights of Northern Lake Huron



In the days before ship-to-shore radios and global positioning systems, lighthouses were the only signposts guiding travelers on the Great Lakes. If you couldn't see them, or the stars and the sun, you were driving blind. This tour visits the Lights of Northern Lake Huron that disappeared from view during the great storm of 1913.

The Storm

The storm began on Friday, November 7, 1913, over Minnesota. At first, it traveled northwest towards Canada, with 40 mph winds. Then, Saturday night, it suddenly turned south. By Sunday, it was a hurricane with 90 mph winds and snow. Captain James B. Watts of the *Durston* was headed north. He saw the "Thunder Bay" light around 1:30pm Sunday afternoon and then, nothing. "The sea was coming over us from both sides. It was terrible-higher than the cabins. Finally, around 8:00am Monday morning the Spectacle Reef Light pierced the storm, and Watts knew where he was. A man of wry humor, he noted, "The one mercy the storm showed us was to seal our hatches and for'd cabins and windows with a thick armor-plating of ice." Most boats on the lake that day were not so fortunate. Some ran aground. Eight on Lake Huron went down with all hands.

Charity Island and Tawas Point

Captain Watts still had decent visibility when he passed the lights that guarded Saginaw and Tawas Bays. Today visitors can have dinner on the porch of the **Charity Island Light** Keepers House and desert on the boat making the return trip to AuGres at sunset. The full experience takes about 3½ hours. The 1876 **Tawas Point Lighthouse**, in Tawas State Park, was erected to guide vessels past Ottawa Point and into Tawas Bay..

Harrisville/Sturgeon Point

Just north of Harrisville the **Sturgeon Point Lighthouse** marks a rocky reef that extends a mile into the lake. Perley Silverhorn donated the land for the light-and became its first keeper. Modern visitors can explore both the light-house exhibits and the point, where an occasional Petoskey stone is found.

Alpena

The last lighthouse Captain Watts saw was on Thunder Bay Island. Land-based travelers are more likely to see the **Alpena Light**, which marks the mouth of the Thunder Bay River. Called "Sputnik" and "Little Red" by locals, the steel tower built in 1914 is sometimes dismissed as "Long on duty, short on beauty." Alpena was at the heart of the 1913 storm. Today the **Thunder Bay Scuba Snorkel** tour gives non-divers a close up look at some of the boats that make **Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary** the only fresh-water sanctuary in the nation. The sanctuary's Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center lets landlubbers experience the shipwrecks and their history. There are more maritime exhibits and the *Katherine V*, a fishing tug, at the Besser Museum.

Middle Island

The *Durston* never saw the **Middle Island Light Station** that terrifying Sunday afternoon. But visitors can see it-and even spend the night in its converted foghorn building-on summer weekends. Tours on Saturdays take three to four hours and include a short boat ride, a nature walk, and up-close views of the lighthouse and its restoration.

Presque Isle

The new **Presque Isle Lighthouse** was completed in 1871; the old one, about a mile south, was built in 1840. You can still visit both of them and climb to the top of their towers. Presque Isle also has range lights-two lights that sailors lined up to enter a harbor safely. Anna Garraty maintained the rear light for years, sitting in a rocking chair on the front porch for her all-night watches. For lunch, try the Portage Restaurant or the Portage General Store.

Rogers City

You can learn about the lives of Great Lakes Mariners like Captain Watts and crew at the **Great Lakes Lore Museum** in Rogers City. There are other maritime treasures in the **Presque Isle County Historical Museum**, and Lakeside Park includes a maritime memorial. At the time of the great storm, it took 36 hours for workers with shovels and wheelbarrows to load 2,000 tons of limestone into a small freighter. At **Harbor View** you can see how 25,000 tons are loaded in 8 hours at the world's largest limestone quarry.

40 Mile Point

The **40 Mile Point Lighthouse** has a two-story brick duplex. On the beach in Lighthouse Park is the wooden hull of the *Joseph S. Fay*, which ran aground in 1905. The park also displays the pilothouse of the S.S. *Calcite*.

Cheboygan

Cheboygan also has a set of range lights-they mark the entrance to the Cheboygan River. The Great Lakes Lightkeepers Association is restoring the **Front Range Light**. To sense the courage of those who tried to rescue stranded sailors on the lakes, visit the self-bailing lifeboat at the **Historical Society of Cheboygan County** or the modern **US Coast Guard Cutter Mackinaw**.

Mackinaw City

Shepler's Lighthouse Cruises take visitors past some of the lights Captain Watts followed through the Straits of Mackinac to Mackinaw City, where the **Mackinaw Point Lighthouse** must have been a welcomed sight. The cruises are splendid on a clear, sunny day, but it's the gray, foggy days that fill the imagination as lights and their fog signals suddenly appear out of nowhere.

1. **Charity Island Lighthouse and Dining Excursions**

113 Newman St., Big Charity Island, East Tawas, MI 48730

Reservations: 989-254-7710 - Phone: 517-579-3182

The island was named by the lake mariners for its location, placed "through the charity of God" midway between the city of Au Gres and the Thumb, at the entrance to Saginaw Bay. Charity Island Light was constructed in 1857, and then replaced by the Gravelly Shoal Light in 1939. Enjoy dinner on Charity Island at the Light-keepers home! The experience begins when you arrive at the East Tawas State dock where you will board the 49 passenger vessel "Shirley Ann" for the one hour trip to Charity Island where you will be greeted by your hosts Bob and Karen Wiltse. Upon arriving, guests receive a lively 30 minute history presentation before taking the 7 minute walk through the woods to the light-keepers home. Dinner is served at the light-keepers house along with breathtaking views of Saginaw Bay. Tours of the house are given after dinner. Dessert is served on the return trip to the mainland which is timed to catch the sunset on the way back. Total time on the island is approximately 3-1/2 hours. The departure time changes each week to compensate for the changing sunset time so check the online schedule often or call for exact departure times. Dinner Cruise departures are also available from Caseville, MI beginning June 2010.

2. **Tawas Point Lighthouse**

686 Tawas Beach Road, East Tawas, MI 48730

Phone: 989-362-5041

Tawas Point Lighthouse, in operation since 1876, and now part of Tawas Point State Park, is a fascinating attraction for maritime buffs. Tawas Point is also a mecca for birdwatchers, especially in the migration seasons of spring and fall. Tawas Point also offers spectacular views of sunrises over Lake Huron and sunsets over Tawas Bay. Guided tours & gift shop are available. Tawas Point State Park is offering the opportunity to be a lighthouse keeper at the Tawas Point Lighthouse and stay in the newly renovated lighthouse keeper's quarters. The lighthouse keeper program is available for one or two week stays, during which the lighthouse keeper(s) will be responsible for a variety of duties, including greeting guests, providing information about the history of the lighthouse, helping in the gift shop and taking care of the various artifacts located in the lighthouse museum. Training is provided on-site upon arrival.

3. **Sturgeon Point Lighthouse**

Alcona Historical Society, Harrisville, MI 48740

Phone: 989-724-5056

Sturgeon Point Lighthouse is located five miles north of Harrisville on Lake Huron and was completed in November 1870. The tower is 70 feet, 9 inches tall and is 16 feet in diameter at its base. The light is 3.5 order Fresnel lens made in Paris, France. The light is still maintained by the U.S. Coast Guard. The keeper's house is now a maritime museum which is open to the public from Memorial Day to mid-September. The lighthouse tower is open to the public. The grounds are open all year.

4. **Alpena Light**

Alpena, MI 49707

Toll Free: 800-425-7362 - Phone: 989-354-4181

While the Alpena Light may not be a typical lighthouse, it does meet the criteria to be called one. Located at the mouth of the Thunder Bay River, the 80-foot skeletal tower is best viewed from the transient docks at the City of Alpena's Marina. Called "Sputnik" (resembles the Russian space satellite) and "Little Red" by locals, it is said this oft dismissed light is "Long on duty, short on beauty." Believed to be the only lighthouse of this type in the U.S., the station was built of wood in 1877, rebuilt of wood in 1888 and finally constructed of steel in 1914. An automated active aid to navigation, the Alpena Light originally housed a Fourth Order Fresnel lens.

5. Thunder Bay Scuba

413 S. Ripley Blvd., Alpena, MI 49707

Phone: 989-356-6228

Thunder Bay Scuba is centrally located along Lake Huron's "Shipwreck Alley" just inside the City of Alpena. We train and supply divers needs from Tawas City in the south to Presque Isle to the north. The Dive Shop sells diving and snorkeling gear from Sherwood, Poseidon, Bare, and Scuba Max. Open seven days a week from Memorial Day to Labor day and five days a week the rest of the year. We offer Air and partial pressure Nitrox fills. If you are diving Tri-Mix and give us enough warning we will add a cylinder of helium to our fill shed so you can mix your own Tri-Mix. Working with charter operators we can book your dives and arrange accommodations for your group. We do our best to show you a good time so when the weather blows your charter off the Lake ask us and we will arrange for alternate dives. If your coming to Alpena, stop by Thunder Bay Scuba for the best advice on diving or snorkeling our wrecks. If you are looking for a Dive Charter, Lodging, Air Fills or Equipment rentals Thunder Bay Scuba is here to help. We would like to help you arrange your entire stay. Our instructors offer PADI Open Water certification as well as the standard Specialties. We have begun to use our own boat for Dive and Snorkel Charters so give us a call!

6. Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary's Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center

500 W. Fletcher St., Alpena, MI 49707

Phone: 989-356-8805

Free admission. Open Summer - Monday - Saturday, 10:00am-5:00pm, Sun, 12:00pm-5:00pm. Winter - Monday - Saturday, 10:00am-5:00pm. The Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary preserves a national treasure, nearly 200 historic shipwrecks in and around the bay. Lake Huron's cold, fresh water preserves many of these shipwrecks intact and in water depths ranging from a few inches to 200 feet, making the sanctuary a popular destination for divers, snorkelers and kayakers. You can explore the history and archaeology of these wrecks at the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center, the Sanctuary's 20,000 square foot, river-front headquarters. Exhibits on Great Lakes maritime history and shipwrecks include the new "Exploring the Shipwreck Century" exhibit, an 8,000 square ft. permanent exhibit featuring a life-sized recreation of a Great Lakes schooner and a shipwreck site. Visitors may also enjoy artifact displays, and interactive learning stations on technology and diving. The Center also features a sanctuary store, state of the art education spaces, high-definition theater, and archaeological conservation lab. Wreck locations are available on our website. While visiting Alpena, you may want to explore the Thunder Bay Sanctuary Research Collection, one of the largest archival collections of Great Lakes maritime history, located at the Alpena County Library.

7. Besser Museum for Northeast Michigan

491 Johnson Street, Alpena, MI 49707

Phone: 989-356-2202

Come visit Northeast Michigan's center for art, history and science with our displays of arts and crafts, native Americans, geology, industry, and a recreated 1890's street of shops. Our 19th century historic buildings including the Green School, Spratt Church, Maltz Exchange Bank, and McKay Log Cabin. Museum hours are Monday through Saturday 10:00am to 5:00pm. Planetarium shows are offered on Saturdays at 2pm. Shows change quarterly so call ahead for the current show information.

8. Middle Island Keeper's Lodge & Boat Tours

Middle Island Light Station, Alpena, MI 49707

Reservations: 989-884-2722

Middle Island is an unspoiled rustic retreat located on Lake Huron between Thunder Bay and Presque Isle in Alpena County. Middle Island Boat Tours take lighthouse aficionados on a nautical tour of the island and the waters surrounding it. Don't forget to bring your camera! Afterward, dock at Middle Island, and take part in an island nature walk and tour of the restoration efforts of the lighthouse and the Keepers' quarters. The tour lasts for 3 - 4 hours. Bring your own picnic lunch and enjoy lunch on the island. Boat tours are Saturdays at 10am and reservations are needed! Cost is \$35 for adults and \$25 for children under 12. Overnight lodging is also available in the former Foghorn Building, with accommodations for up to eight people. This rustic lodge offers guests the experience of staying on an uninhabited island while still having modern conveniences at their disposal. Better yet, it offers panoramic views of the water and lighthouse! Propane appliances and heated outdoor showers included. Check out rates on our website.

9. New Presque Isle Lighthouse Park and Museum

4500 East Grand Lake Road, Presque Isle, MI 49777

Phone: 989-595-5419

Presque Isle Light Station is a complex of three historic buildings including a lighthouse tower and two keeper's residences. Located on the Lake Huron shoreline near Presque Isle Harbor, the "New Presque Isle Light" is the tallest lighthouse tower accessible by the public on the Great Lakes. Built in 1870, it replaced the 1840 harbor light. The light station complex is part of a 99-acre township park that includes a playground, picnic area, pavilion and nature trails. A gift shop is located in the original keeper's quarters connected to the tower. Visitors, for a nominal fee, may climb the 130 steps to the top of the tower for a spectacular view. An unattached 1905 keeper's dwelling has been painstakingly restored. It is now a museum that provides visitors with an opportunity to learn about local history, as well as, how keepers and their families lived. The buildings and grounds are open to the public daily from 9am-6pm, mid-May through mid-October. The 1905 House is open Memorial Day through Labor Day, 11am-5pm Tuesday through Saturday, 1pm-5pm Sunday, closed on Monday.

10. Old Presque Isle Lighthouse

5295 E. Grand Lake Rd., Presque Isle, MI 49777

Phone: 989-595-6979

The Old Presque Isle Lighthouse is one of the oldest surviving lighthouses on the Great Lakes. Built in 1840 by Jeremiah Moors of Detroit, the harbor light operated until 1871 when the keeper transferred to a new, taller, coastal lighthouse a mile to the north. The Old Presque Isle Lighthouse park is a complex composed of two main structures, a keeper's dwelling and a light tower. The stone and brick tower measures thirty feet tall and eighteen feet in diameter. Visitors can climb the hand-hewn stone steps for a panoramic view of the Lake Huron shoreline and Presque Isle Harbor. Nearby is the one-story side-gabled brick keeper's dwelling which serves as a hands-on museum. Here, visitors can blow foghorns and examine other interesting artifacts. They can also ring the bell from the Lansing City Hall clock tower. Tipping the scales at an impressive 3,425 pounds, this bronze behemoth is much bigger than the Liberty Bell, which weighed 2,080 pounds when cast. Visitors may also pose for the perfect photo opportunity with head and hands in an old set of punishment stocks. The buildings and park grounds are open to the public daily, from 9am until 6pm, mid-May through mid-October. A nominal fee is charged for tower climbs.

11. Presque Isle Range Light Park

At Presque Isle Harbor, Presque Isle, MI 49777

Phone: 989-595-6526

By the time the New Presque Isle Light Tower was erected in 1870, Presque Isle Harbor was a routine stop for many vessels conducting trade along the Lake Huron shoreline. A natural harbor of refuge, Presque Isle also provided safe and welcome shelter from sudden and powerful storms. The New Presque Isle Light Tower alerted the mariners to impending dangers while the two smaller Range Lights guided them safely into harbor. When the lights were aligned, the mariner knew the safest and easiest path into-or out-of-the harbor. The rear range light included living quarters for a keeper and family and is now a private residence. Modern, automated lights have replaced historic ones, but most of the original structures remain. The old front range light was relocated to the entrance of the Old Presque Isle Lighthouse grounds, where it stood for many years. It was moved back to near its original location in 2004 and there faithfully restored. The grave of Adeline Sims, wife of range light Keeper William Sims, is located to the side of the keeper's path in a small, fenced-in area. Legend has it that while her husband and fellow Masons held meetings in the rear range light, she overheard and memorized secret passages. To seal her lips, she was made a member. Adeline Sims died an invalid in 1881, and was buried with a Masonic emblem on her gravestone. Sims is the only woman so honored by the Masons.

12. Great Lakes Lore Maritime Museum

367 N. 3rd St., Rogers City, MI 49779

Phone: 989-734-0706

The Great Lakes Lore Maritime Museum in Rogers City offers an opportunity to learn about Great Lakes maritime commerce and the stories of men and women whose vocation is connected to this industry. Uniforms and personal possessions of ship captains and sailors, maritime tools, cabin furniture, foul weather gear, lockers, lifeboats and other items offer a glimpse into the daily lives of Great Lakes mariners. Visitors can see a number of ship miniatures, photographs and drawings of Great Lakes vessels, lighthouses, docks and shipping offices. The museum is also a "Great Lakes Maritime Hall of Fame" with annual inductees joining the individuals whose lives and accomplishments on the Great Lakes are permanently stored and chronicled. The museum is open daily 10:00am to 4:00pm May 1 until mid-December and Mondays only throughout the winter. Tours for groups are offered with advance reservations.

13. Presque Isle County Historical Museum

176 West Michigan, Rogers City, MI 49779

Phone: 989-734-4121

Housed in the Bradley House which is an early 20th century, seven bedroom, two story, single family bungalow built in 1914, a national historic site. This house was the home of the president of Michigan Limestone & Chemical Company, the largest industry in this community. Features furnishings of the early 1920's, Indian artifacts, a 1980's general store, a Victorian music room, and displays on the industries of farming, lumbering, and shipping.

14. Harbor View

Calcite Road, off Woodward, Rogers City, MI 49779

Toll Free: 800-622-4148 - Phone: 989-734-2535

When Michigan Limestone's Calcite Plant opened in 1914, it took over 35 hours of backbreaking shoveling to load a small ship with just over two tons of limestone. Today, a massive modern freighter can be loaded with 25,000 tons of stone in eight hours or less. At Harbor View, you can get a close-up view of the huge freighters as they load limestone destined for ports all around the Great Lakes. Harbor View is located on the grounds of the world's largest limestone quarry and is open from 8 a.m. until dusk during the Great Lakes shipping season.

15. 40 Mile Point Lighthouse

Lighthouse Park, 7323 US 23 N, Rogers City, MI 49779

Phone: (989)734-4587

40 Mile Point Lighthouse is located on the northern shoreline of Lake Huron in Presque Isle County's Lighthouse Park, Rogers City, Michigan. At a cost of \$25,000, the station was completed by the end of 1896. Its 4th Order Fresnel lens has been a welcoming beacon to sailors since May 1897 and is still operating today. In 1996, the 40 Mile Point Lighthouse Society began restoring the lighthouse, outbuildings and grounds. Several years ago, the pilot house from the Steamer Calcite, built in 1912 and the first self-unloading steamer on the Lakes, was relocated to the reservation. The Society, with the help of many retired Great Lakes sailors, has also restored and preserved this structure. The park is open to the public year-round. The lighthouse museum, pilot house and gift shop are open 10:00am to 4:00pm Tuesday through Sunday beginning Memorial Day weekend through mid-October. Admission is free. Group tours can also be arranged. Ask about our Guest Lighthouse Keeper program.

16. Cheboygan River Front Range Lighthouse

606 Water Street, Cheboygan, MI 49721

Phone: 231-436-5580

The Great Lakes Lighthouse Keepers Association is proud to announce that they will be opening the Cheboygan River Front Range lighthouse to the public from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm on Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend. GLLKA took ownership of the 1880 lighthouse through the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act in June 2004, and will undertake the restoration of the station to its' 1920 appearance over the next four years. As such, this represents a unique opportunity for lighthouse lovers to view the restoration in progress. For an entry fee of \$5.00 for adults, \$3.00 for children, visitors will be able to tour the lighthouse and learn of its rich history from volunteer GLLKA keepers. The lighthouse also features a gift shop stocked with a large assortment of Great Lakes lighthouse-related books, apparel and gifts, with all proceeds to be applied directly to the restoration of the lighthouse. Arrangements can also be made to visit and enter the Cheboygan Crib Light with volunteers working at the lighthouse.

17. Cheboygan County Historical Museum Complex

Huron and Court Streets, Cheboygan, MI 49721

Phone: 231-627-9597

Come and explore the rich history of the Cheboygan area at the Cheboygan County Historical Museum Complex. Located at Huron and Court Streets in Cheboygan, the County Seat, the complex consists of five buildings four of which house artifacts and historic exhibits of the past, along with beautiful flowering gardens and the Memorial Rose Garden. The buildings in the complex include: Settlers Log Cabin originally located on Burt Lake in a local Indian Village, the Cheboygan County Sheriff residence constructed in 1882, the old Jail, attached to the Sheriff's quarters and built in about 1912, the decorative Cement Block Garage built in the 1940s, and Spies Heritage Hall, an exhibit hall where the lumbering, maritime, general store and schoolroom exhibits were expanded and moved to.

18. Icebreaker Mackinaw Maritime Museum

131 S. Huron Ave., Mackinaw City, MI 49701

Phone: 231-436-9825

USCG ICEBREAKER MACKINAW WAGB-83 "An American Hero Story". The "Queen of the Great Lakes" was built as part of the war effort during World War II to meet the heavy demands of war materials and transportation during the winter months. Decommissioned in 2006, she now resides at her namesake home of Mackinaw City and is open for public tours and group events. Visit the Mess Deck, Engine Room, offices and more and hear the story of the Mackinaw's 62-year career breaking ice on the Great Lakes and serving as a goodwill ambassador throughout the region.

19. Shepler's Lighthouse Cruises

556 E. Central Avenue, Mackinaw City, MI 49701

Reservations: 800-828-6157 - Phone: 231-436-5023

On a Shepler's Lighthouse Cruise, you'll see these guardians of the Great Lakes like you've never seen them before! Nine historic lighthouses lie within easy cruising distance of Mackinaw City. Shepler's large, spacious vessels provide safe, comfortable passage on these fascinating 3-hour tours. Choose from a westward (Lake Michigan side) or eastbound (Lake Huron side) cruise. Or perhaps an all-day or 2-day excursion. All tours visit at least four lighthouses, pass directly under the mighty Mackinac Bridge and are professionally narrated by members of the Great Lakes Lighthouse Keepers Association.

20. Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse

Mackinaw City, MI 49701

Phone: (231)436-4100

Look around. This is a setting that has inspired generations. With its impressive buff-colored brick walls, large square tower topped with battlements, and elegant fourth order Fresnel lens, this lighthouse-built in 1892-is a source for inspiration. Surrounding it is a beautifully landscaped lawn dotted with vibrant pine trees and the refurbished fog signal station and barn. And then there's the backdrop: Sparkling beach sand, the majestic Straits of Mackinac, and the magnificent Mackinac Bridge, acting as a vista connecting the past, present, and future. Climb the tower and breathe in the spectacular view as generations of lighthouse keepers did before you. Step inside the lighthouse, and hear the Victrola play pre-World War I tunes in a period-styled sitting room. Explore nighttime navigation and Great Lakes' shipwrecks. Interact with hands-on exhibits. Ask questions. Immerse yourself. Inside this stately structure, it's always 1910, so welcome and discover.