

# The paddling's picture-perfect in Michigan

Kayaking is the only way to go to see Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore in the Upper Peninsula.

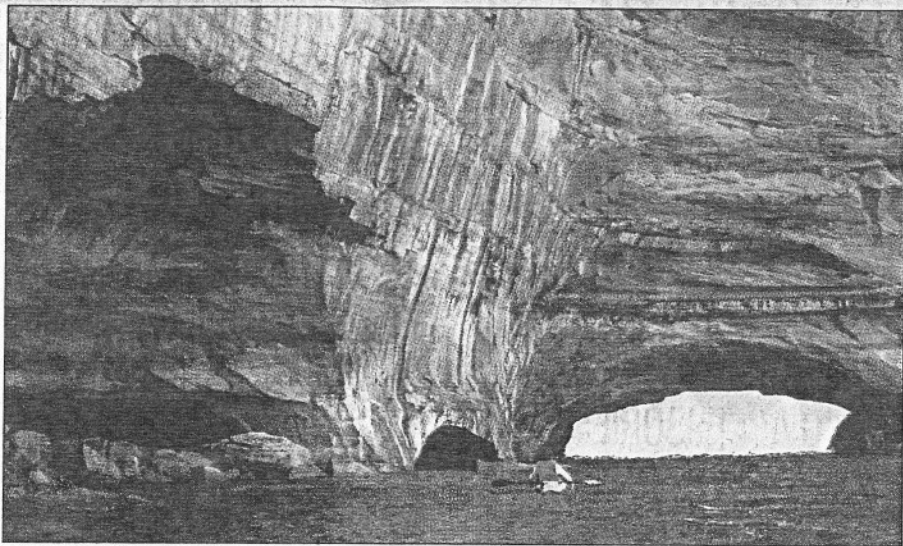
By TED VILLAIRE  
SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

Underneath the kayak, giant slabs of bedrock and house-size boulders looked like ruins of a sunken city, faded and worn by the frigid water of Lake Superior. I paddled over a dark empty expanse. A few more strokes and a yellow sandstone boulder jutted up through the green-tinted depths, nearly touching the water's surface.

The 200-foot cliffs above were decorated with a kaleidoscope of colors: red, olive, orange and deep blue. Above the sandstone walls, a line of birches swayed in the fresh, gentle wind off the lake. A loon landed, briefly dipped its head underwater and watched with vague interest as we paddled by.

On the northern shore of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore is a beautiful, puzzling and sometimes harsh slice of the Midwest. Appropriately, it was designated the first National Lakeshore in 1966.

Having hiked the trail



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**Close view:** The Grand Portal features a stone arch large enough for a train to pass through, and a nearby shallow cave illuminated by sunlight reflecting off water.



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along the top of the cliffs the year before, three friends and I were eager to return—but this time, to see the most dramatic 15 miles of the park's towering ledges while floating in sea kayaks. If

good weather held, we planned to spend our third and final night among the cliffs and isolated beaches of nearby Grand Island.

We began the kayaking journey inland at Beaver Lake, a pristine 400-acre lake surrounded by dense forest, and not a cabin in sight. A Michigan travel guide from the 1940s fittingly describes Beaver Lake as "one of the most inaccessible spots in the Upper Peninsula."

Beaver Lake empties into Lake Superior midway along the narrow 43-mile stretch of park shoreline. When we reached Lake

Superior, we headed southwest toward 15 miles of rock walls, then to Grand Island, and finally to the town of Munising.

Two hours out, we found the hot sun making a rainbow through fine mist produced by a 100 foot-high waterfall. Several ravens gathered in pine trees at the top of the cliff. We were tempted to paddle right under the falls, but cautiously portaged our kayaks behind the falls along a submerged rock ledge.

At our first camp site, I

## How did area get that way?

The multicolored cliffs at Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore comprise three layers of rock. Closest to the lake level—and usually submerged—is the red sandstone from the late Precambrian period, some 600 million years ago. The vertical cliff faces, angled slopes and strange shapes are nearly all composed of 500-million-year-old Cambrian sandstone. At the top of the cliffs is the 400-million-year-old lime-based rock, a hard sandstone that caps and protects the softer sandstone below.

The most recent glacier covering the Great Lakes region, which gave the area its present appearance, began to retreat about 10,000 years ago. As the glacier shrank, the removal of weight caused the land in many places to rise. At Pictured Rocks, the rising land exposed sandstone cliffs. Water and ice sculpted the soft rock for thousands of years, creating the smooth surfaces, sheer walls, arches, caves and columns.

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# Paddlers see Pictured Rocks up close

PADDLING, from Page 11E

was nearly driven to madness by swarms of biting flies. Unhindered by our potent bug repellent, the flies landed on us by the dozens, trying to bite through our thick wetsuits, which we wore for protection against the chilly lake waters, which only get up to the mid-40s in summer. Deceptively similar in appearance to the ordinary house fly, these sand flies, as they're called, produce a stinging bite and require a solid whack to do them in. It was early July and the flies were still fierce in numbers, despite having reached their annual population peak a few weeks earlier.

By nightfall the flies mysteriously disappeared, allowing us to sleep on the beach underneath a startling night sky. Fortunately, these little flesh-hungry beasts were only a minor annoyance the rest of the trip.

In the morning, we discovered that a crafty raccoon had somehow

scaled the campground's food pole and pilfered several selections from our menu for the next few days. Squinting in the morning sun, the four of us stood around the steel pole dumbfounded trying to fathom the raccoon's successful strategy.

Luckily, our loss was not critical: We had brought enough food to feed a regional Boy Scout jamboree. Fortunately, most of it — including the important stuff, the pâté and cheap whiskey — was secured in our kayaks' watertight storage compartments. We felt like accomplished outdoorsmen that morning as we sipped coffee and discussed our recent trials with the bugs and varmints.

Later that day as we passed the most dramatic sections of the shoreline, we became rock connoisseurs, gazing at strange sandstone formations with evocative names such as Battleship Rock, Gull Rooker, Indian Head, and Lovers

Leap. The most spectacular sights included Rainbow Cave, a deep overhang with multicolored strata of rock, resembling a cross-section of a layered cake.

The colors in the rock emerge when minerals such as iron, limonite, manganese, and copper ooze from the porous sandstone and become oxidized. At times, the brilliant pigments and striking compositions make these "pictures" appear as though they were applied by human hands. Other times the images are just chaotic dark stains on the rock.

Before heading to Grand Island, we spent an afternoon at a

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formation called Miners Castle where we alternated between sitting in the sun and leaping into the water off a slab of rock that looked like lava flow. Because the nearby beach is one of the only areas along Pictured Rocks accessible by car, we expected a small crowd. To our surprise, we encountered only a few fellow kayakers.

The only regular reminder of the outside world during the four-day trip were the occasional small tourist airplanes zooming overhead and, more frequently, the large, white tour boats sputtering by. From Miners Castle we began the three-mile journey out to Grand Island. Now in open water, we struggled against the wind pushing us off course and the waves splashing over our bows. Exhausted, we landed on a long ivory beach and laid down for a nap with our paddles at our sides.

After setting up our tents, I hiked through a thick forest of sugar maple, paper birch, and pine trees to the top of a nearby cliff, hoping to see a peregrine falcon or a bald

eagle that nest high up on the rocks.

Along the way, I met a frequent visitor to the island who pointed out a bald eagle's nest. It was a huge jumble of sticks, roomy enough to sleep two small children. The man said he comes to the island every year looking for birds of prey, as well as sharp-tailed grouse, sandpipers, warblers, sand hill cranes and the occasional black bear.

That night we ate our final dinner, then rested. The next day we would portage our 75-pound kayaks nearly a mile to Murray Bay on the other side of the island.

In Murray Bay, a white buoy marks the resting place of the Bermuda, a 136-foot-long schooner that sank in 1870. Much of the ship's stern can be seen a mere dozen feet below the surface. Throughout the trip, the weather served as a benevolent host — scarcely a cloud and never a chill in the wind. There were sore arms and backs, though, combined with a few blisters on the hands and the inevitable bit of sunburn on faces and arms.

Without exception we maintained the lazy schedule of paddling no more than three hours a day. This allowed ample time to explore the woods, climb on the rocks, nap on bare beaches, and take an occasional dip when we felt brave enough to endure the painfully cold water.

With a light breeze behind us, we pointed our kayaks away from the beauty and isolation of Grand Island and Picture Rocks and began paddling several miles toward Munising.

Ted Villaire is a freelance writer from Chicago.

## Pictured Rocks

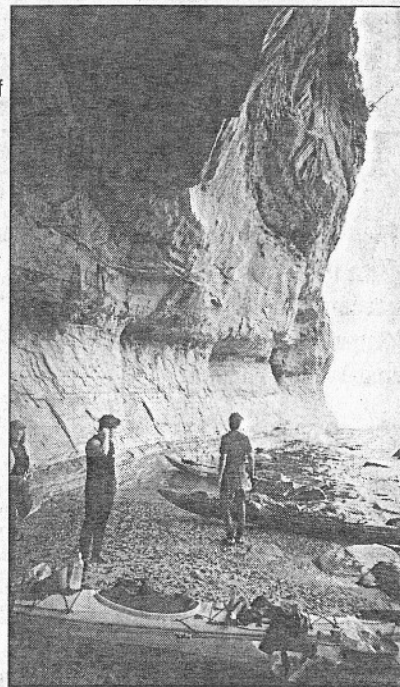
**DIRECTIONS:** Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore is on the southern shore of Lake Superior in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Munising, a town of about 3,500, is at the southern end of the park, and serves as the jumping off point for many activities in the area, including mountain biking, hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, sea kayaking, scuba diving, boating and swimming for the hardy. From Des Moines, take I-80 to Chicago, U.S. Hwy 41 north through Wisconsin to M-94 to Munising.

**THE PARK:** Visit the Pictured Rocks Visitor Information Center, in Munising at the junction of M-28 and H-58, for the best local information about the park. For a small cost, the center issues backcountry camping permits for kayakers and hikers who use any of the half-dozen campgrounds on the Pictured Rocks Lakeshore. Permits are required; a reservation is a good idea if using the campgrounds on a summer holiday weekend. Bring a water purifier. Drinking water and toilets are not available at the backcountry campgrounds. With a few restrictions, camping is permitted anywhere on Grand Island. A ferry to the island runs from Munising mid-May to October, and costs \$12.

Visitor Center address: P.O. Box 40, Munising, Michigan. Phone: (906) 387-3700 or (906) 387-2607 or [www.nps.gov/piro/](http://www.nps.gov/piro/) on the Web.

**KAYAKING:** Northern Waters Adventures, a kayaking and mountain biking operation, is on the west shore of Munising Bay off W. Munising Ave. near the public boat launch. Northern Waters offers kayak sales, rental, instruction, guided trips and shuttle services. Make rental reservations in advance. Phone: (906) 387-2323.

**WHEN TO GO:** Mosquitoes and black flies can be very bad from mid-May to mid-July. Bring plenty of insect repellent and even a head net during those months. Summer water temperature of Lake Superior is 46-48 degrees.



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**Beached:** Wetsuits are necessary for the mid-40s temperatures of Lake Superior's waters in summer.

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BALTIMORE	295.00	NASHVILLE	159.00
BRANSON/SPRGF	261.00	NEW ORLEANS	318.00
CANCUN	571.00	NEW YORK	238.00
CLEVELAND	159.00	OKLAHOMA CITY	244.00
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DAYTON	159.00	PORTLAND	443.00
DENVER	319.00	RALEIGH DURHAM	215.00
DETROIT	308.00	RICHMOND	310.00