

TOO MANY TO COUNT

TOURING ONTARIO'S FAMOUS 1000 ISLANDS ON A PWC

BY CRAIG NICHOLSON

OUR SEA-DOO tour of the world-famous 1000 Islands last summer was an unforgettable trailer boating experience. Located on the St. Lawrence River, between Kingston and Brockville, the Islands offer everything from open water to sheltered channels...plus countless magical opportunities for exploration and discovery. Best of all, for either personal watercraft or trailer boat touring, the waterway is well marked and easily navigable, with little worry about unexpected rocks or shallow spots.

We trailered to our launching point, the Glen House Resort, situated in the heart of the 1000 Islands, just east of Gananoque. The

eight of us, each on his own Sea-Doo watercraft, planned to spend the first day cruising upriver to Kingston and back. The next day, we would navigate downriver to Brockville, then cross into American waters for our return.

Frankly, I wasn't sure what to expect. I knew that the north shore is Canada and the south is the United States. I could also see from St. Lawrence charts that once amid the Islands, some would be ours, others would be theirs, and a few would be a bit of both. Locals informed me that boating through American waters was no problem, but not to go ashore on U.S. soil without first checking in with U.S. Customs and Immigration. We decided not to set

foot stateside and easily planned our fuel and food stops accordingly. Just in case, however, we carried our passports and ID.

WOW...was I ever unprepared for the majesty of the 1000 Islands! Their picturesque topography blends rocky shorelines and dense foliage with rugged islets of every size and shape. Their magnificent presence quickly transformed my normal expectation that river riding consists of travelling a



Private boat launch at Glen House Resort.



linear strip of unbroken water contained by two shores. Instead, we experienced a jigsaw puzzle of cruising choices...big water, small water, scenic channels, large bays, small coves, backwaters, hidden inlets, oodles of shore, and of course, too many islands to count!

And how about those cottages...or should I say mansions? The 1000 Islands is a recreational playground for many well-off families whose palatial residences equal those of Muskoka. From century old to ultra-contemporary and everything in between, this eye candy architecture considerably enhances the area's overall wow factor.

I knew from our charts that the main channels and small craft routes are officially marked. Once I familiarized myself with key marker numbers, navigation was straightforward, with red to the right heading to Kingston. Generally, the markers parallel the mainland, so whichever set you follow (assuming that it isn't a marina channel) will eventually merge with a main channel.

Note that there are parallel Canadian and American channels for much of the waterway between Kingston and Brockville. Clusters of islands separate them most of the time. Consequently, what we initially perceived as mainland often turned out to be another island. However, knowing that Canada was always north, we had little trouble working our way back to our side and Glen House Resort each day.

The charts also indicated numerous rocks and shoals, some similar to those

Singer Castle was completed in 1905 for \$500,000 US and remained in the Bourne Family until the mid-sixties.



Preparing for a day on tour involves much more than donning a PFD!

found in Georgian Bay's inner channel. From the seats of our Sea-Doo watercraft, all were either clearly visible or their markers were. That's one of the benefits of riding a waterway frequented by lots of residents and cottagers with many big, expensive cruisers and runabouts...everything's well marked for and/or by them!

I bet there are as many cruise boats as there are islands! Based in virtually every centre along the river, they come in all sizes and configurations. These ubiquitous and slow moving boats hardly make any wake. When we had a doubt, following one (or watching

where it came from) helped put us back on route. We didn't worry much about getting lost anyway, because even during those August weekdays, pleasure craft were abundant and many people were at their cottages.

Wind was relatively calm for our two days, so surface conditions ranged from mild chop in the open to dead calm in protected areas. We did encounter a prevailing turbulence caused by powerful undercurrents as the river narrows at the Ivy Lea – Thousand Islands International



Riding under the guns of Old Fort Henry at Kingston, ON.

GREAT TRAILER BOATING CANADA DESTINATIONS – 1000 ISLANDS

SEA-DOO TOUR ITINERARY

Day One

Glen House Resort to Kingston return (4 to 6 hours by personal watercraft, depending on speed, fuel and lunch stops)



Outbound Route: Turn to starboard at H18 and again to starboard at H23. Go through Gananoque narrows to J2 and follow markers past Gananoque. Turn starboard again at J18 into Bateau Channel and follow it to Kingston.

Return Route: Proceed east from Kingston Harbour to H43 and keep bearing to starboard at H42 and H39 to the south side of Howe Island. Parallel shore to H34 in centre of Canadian Middle Channel and on to H33. Go through narrows to H30 and turn starboard, then follow markers back to H18.

Fuel Stops: Starting with full tanks, we fuelled at Rideau Marina, Kingston and Gordon Marina, Gananoque.

Restaurants near docks: Several at Confederation Marina, Kingston; Island Grill, beside ferry dock on Wolfe Island; Gananoque Inn.

Day Two

Glen House Resort to Brockville return (4 to 6 hours, depending on speed, fuel and lunch stops)

Outbound Route: Pick up HV9 outside bay just east of resort and turn to port. Follow HV markers under Ivy Lea - Thousand Islands International Bridge through Raft Narrows and bear slightly to port at Rockport into marked small craft route between Tar and Grenadier Islands (U20). At U17, bear starboard into small craft route that parallels the north (Canadian) shore all the way to Brockville.

Return Route: Just before reaching the Three Sisters Islands at Brockville, turn 90° to starboard (southeast) and cross the St. Lawrence to Morristown, NY, and follow the U.S. shore back (watch out for Singer Castle at R166) to Alexandria Bay (opposite Boldt Castle) and then into the American Narrows (marker 194), which take you under the U.S. span of Ivy Lea -Thousand Islands bridge. Between markers 216 and 216A, take a 90° starboard and head north into a large bay, at the back of which is The Narrows. Proceed through and maintain northerly course straight across Eel bay and to the Canadian Middle Channel dead ahead. Turn to starboard at H23 and then port at H18 back to Glen House Resort.

Fuel Stops: Gilbert Marina, Brockville; Ed Huck Marine (also Sea-Doo dealer), Rockport.

Restaurants near docks: Bud's on the Bay, Brockville

www.glenhouseressort.com

www.1000islandsgananoque.com

V162F
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Built around 1900 by George C. Boldt, millionaire proprietor of the world famous Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City, Boldt Castle is now a popular tourist attraction near Alexandria Bay, N.Y.

Bridge to the U.S. near Rockport. A similar phenomenon also happened in the wake of several huge freighters using the Seaway channel, but neither of these occurrences affected our very stable personal

watercraft. That said, I wouldn't recommend venturing out, especially in open areas, if winds are strong.

We picked Glen House Resort because of its location, amenities and ample parking. (It also offers the

Smuggler's Glen Golf Course). Easily accessible from the Thousand Islands Parkway off the 401, Glen House is also situated at waterside in a sheltered bay, with its own boat launch and docks for guests. The main Canadian channel crosses directly in front of that bay at marker H18, so we set course from there for Kingston to the starboard and Brockville to port.

Besides those already mentioned, highlights of our ride included the Martello towers and Old Fort Henry at Kingston Harbour, the imposing stat-

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DESTINATIONS – 1000 ISLANDS



We cruised past many palatial mansions throughout the 1000 Islands.

ue of St. Lawrence overlooking Raft Narrows on the Canadian shore just east of the Ivy Lea – Thousand Islands International Bridge, and the Singer and Boldt Castles located on islands in the U.S. channel on the way back from Brockville.

I was so impressed with the 1000 Islands, that I made a return trip several weeks later with my wife. She really loved that ride too, and we both agreed that it will become a regular destination for us in summers to come. So whether by PWC or a runabout, trailer boating doesn't get any better than spending a few summer days exploring the 1000 Islands. ●



For our tour, we rode moderate chop in the open water areas.

Craig Nicholson is a powersports writer and cottager who rides his Sea-Doo GTX about 2,500 kilometres each summer and tows with a Triton PWC Trailer. Craig is the author of "Canada's Best Snowmobiling — Your Ultimate Ride Guide". His syndicated column "The Intrepid Snowmobiler" appears in newspapers throughout North America. He also hosts "The Intrepid Snowmobiler on Radio" and appears regularly on Snowmobiler Television. For more info, click www.intrepidsnowmobiler.com.