
Stop 58. Pictured Rocks

Arrival datetime: Friday, July 26, 12:15AM
Sites visited: Pictured Rocks National Lake Shore
Accommodations: The Sunset Motel
States traveled: Michigan

The rain was the hard and constant for the first hour of the drive. In that time, we made only forty miles, to Houghton. We stopped for dinner at a steakhouse whose idea of stuffed shrimp was an unrecognizable fried lump with a tail sticking out. But it was fast and put us back on the road before 10:00PM. The rain had stopped by then, but it was still very cloudy and so very dark. We knew we were driving along Lake Superior because we kept seeing “Scenic Pullouts.” But there was no point in stopping, there was no possibility of even a nighttime view of the waves on the water.

We arrived at The Sunset Motel after midnight. It was on a dead end, right on Lake Superior. It had a private beach and picnic area. There were lounge chairs outside the room that looked out onto the lake. It was a pity we would spend almost no time there. We slept late, getting up and out just in time to down some coffee and donuts before the 10:00AM Pictured Rocks Boat Cruise. We were early enough to get the last seat on the top deck. Five minutes after sitting, even before launch, we realized why the seat had been vacant. Behind us, a mentally disturbed adult was shouting nonsense and moving around erratically on his seat. However, he was traveling with two elderly parents who

seemed to be taking it in stride, so we made the best of it as well. The shouting was always the same syllable or two, “ga-aahh.” We soon got somewhat accustomed to it, though it pervaded nonetheless.

As we departed, the captain let us know that it would take 30 minutes to get to the Pictured Rocks. He reassured us that we should not worry too much about all the shipwreck stories we heard about Lake Superior, because we were at that point the furthest we would be from land. “We will never be more than 275 feet from land,” he said, “straight down.” We had indeed seen many books and maps of shipwrecks at the Ferry ship store in Copper Harbor. We had even bought an analysis of the wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald. It had the full lyrics to Gordon’s Lightfoot’s song version of the tale. Jennifer knew the tune from hearing it on the radio when it came out, and had sung it in the car on the way down. “With a load of iron ore 26,000 tons more than the Edmund Fitzgerald laid empty...The good ship and crew were a bone to be chewed when the gales of November came early....” It was very eerie watching the water with that song going through our heads. Luckily, we had not been listening to it on the much more tumultuous ferry ride.



View of the shoreline from Lake Superior.

The skies were cloudy but the wind was calm. We had good views of the now familiar sandstone layers with mineral-laden water leeching out of the rock and dripping down the side. It was the by far the most vertically striped sandstone we had seen on the trip. Very thin stripes of orange, yellow, red, blue, green, bright white, and black demonstrated that there was copper, iron, calcium, and manganese in the water, respectively.

There were a couple of arches and sculpted formations with names that reflected their shape, Miner's Castle, Indian Head, Lover's Leap. The rock formations were also much like those we had seen out west, though the tallest was only 200 feet high. We figured the rest

was under water, as the Yosemite and Glacier park valleys had been at one time.

"Chapel Rock" was the last formation the captain narrated. It was a cavernous formation over a hundred feet high and perhaps fifty feet across. Our boat moved into it head first until we were no more than twenty feet from all three walls of the rock formation. We stayed there for at least three full minutes before backing back out. We stayed within a hundred feet from the rock for the entire way back to the harbor. Once in the harbor, the captain announced that a mate was going to throw bread to some seagulls. We thought it was a joke, but he actually did. We wondered how long the Chapel Rock and the seagull amusements would



An arch at Pictured Rocks.

continue before the Park Service found
out and found a way to make them stop.

Miles traveled: 193
Departure datetime: Friday, July 26, 12:30PM
Departure weather: 70° Sunny