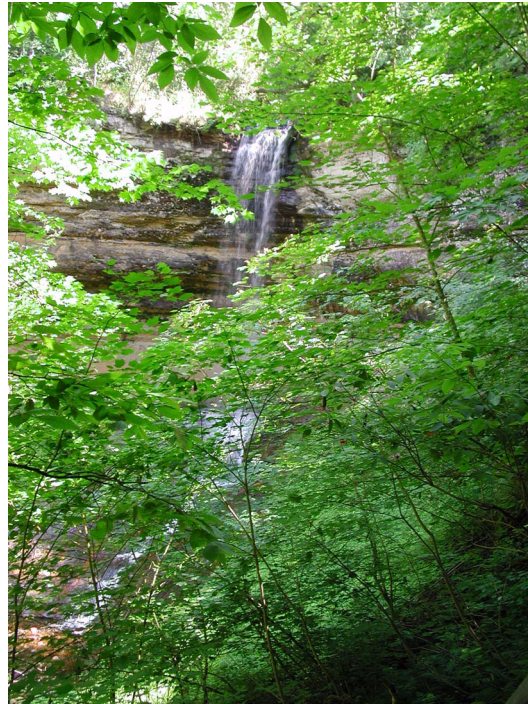

Stop 59. Sleep Bear Dunes

Arrival datetime: Friday, July 27, 7:45PM
Sites visited: Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lake Shore
Accommodations: Maple Lane Resort
States traveled: Michigan

We left Munising after the ferry ride, but lingered at the edge of the Pictured Rocks National Lake Shore to have a picnic lunch at Munising Falls. We walked to an overlook above the falls, but the foliage was so thick and the falls so thin, we could barely see it. From glimpses at odd angle, we saw that the falls were at least 60 feet high, with clear water flowing over smooth and shiny rocks. However, we had seen so many powerfully roaring waterfalls on this trip, we took this idyllic scene almost entirely for granted. In addition, a group passing by that included five or six loud and obnoxious thirteen-year-old boys detracted a bit from the atmosphere.

When we first hit Lake Michigan at just after 3:00PM, it seemed as if we had time to stop for a swim. But given that we still about 150 miles to go, we waited to make sure. From that point on, we had so much traffic that we had to call and change our dinner reservations from 7:30 to 8:00PM, and we barely made that. Apparently, Friday nights in July are not the time to be making your way to the West Coast of Michigan. But we had plenty of Lake views and stopped for new book on tape and music CD, so we kept ourselves entertained.



Munising Falls.

Upon arrival, we found our “room in the main lodge with a private bath” was actually, “a room in the main lodge and a private bath.” The private bathroom was accessible only from the hallway. The desk clerk mumbled something about having to give up the old-fashioned iron tub if they were to put a doorway in the bathroom that led directly into the guest room. That sounded like a good idea to us, as there were no shelves or soap dishes accessible from the old fashion iron tub,

making a shower in there a challenging experience. But we did get directions to La Bear in Glen Arbor, a very good restaurant where we watched the sun set through clouds over Lake Michigan.

We rose early the next morning to spec out Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lake Shore. It was the second Park Service Video that recounted the Indian Legend of how the lake's landmasses were formed rather than giving a scientific version of geological history. According to the legend, a mother bear and two cubs swam across Lake Michigan to escape a fire. When the mother reached shore, she turned to look for her cubs but they had drowned. A god took pity on her and put the North and South Manitou Islands where the cubs had gone under. The mother bear went to sleep on shore, and the dunes mark her resting place.

This was the last National Park that we would visit on the drive. We took our time choosing souvenirs before taking off for the scenic drives. We stopped for an interpretive nature trail that pointed out the major features of the landscape, that is, sand dunes, blowouts where the wind had turned sand dunes into sand bowls, beach grass, sand reed, juniper and cottonwood trees. The trail guide pointed out that the plants had desert-like adaptations, even though the area got an average annual rainfall of thirty inches. The combination of wind, sun, and lack of absorbent soil created conditions that seemed desert-like to a plant.

At the halfway point of the loop hike, we came upon the top of an area designated for dune climbing. Far below our overlook, we saw a parking lot under a very steep sand cliff over a hundred high.

At the top of that was a plateau of sand. The plateau was surrounded by grasses and paths to other sand bowls. All of these areas were deep with soft white sand. A couple hundred people had managed to walk up the steep sand cliff and were wandering around barefoot. In one of the bowls to the far left was a religious slogan written in driftwood logs. It was clearly visible from a thousand yards away.

It was sunny and warm with a slight breeze, completely comfortable weather for sand combing. We joined the throngs in the soft white sand. We took off our hiking boots and carried them through the paths from bowl to bowl. When we reached the bowl with the religious slogan, Jennifer rearranged the driftwood so that it spelled "USA" instead. We



USA spelled out in driftwood.

figured even the people who had written the religious message could not object to such a politically correct transformation. We meandered back to our nature trail, finding that there were several spots along the way that showcased our patriotic display.

We toured the scenic lake overlooks on our way to the Platt River. A Ranger in



Some typical dunes at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lake Shore.

the Visitor Center had recommended it for swimming. She said that it was popular to float down the Platt River into Lake Michigan. So popular in fact, we almost did not get a parking space, luckily ignoring the parking attendant who said the lot was full and “vultured” while a jeep left an empty space. We put on our swim suits, packed up a lunch, and found an empty bench on a park of green grass overlooking the Platt. There were several people floating in the water toward the lake. Some came on tubes and canoes from further up the river than we could see. Others were walking into the water further down the river where the grassy shoreline turned into a beach. We walked

in at a canoe launch and immediately started our float.

The river was about thirty feet across and the water was warm enough to submerge ourselves without hesitation. Jennifer had been taught in Girl Scouts that when floating downstream, you need to keep your feet ahead of you in order to bounce off obstacles if necessary. But it was hard to float on your back with feet forward and see where you were going. It took a lot of arm activity to keep afloat. Michael discovered we could actually kick a bit against the current and still float downstream.



Popular dune hike. Lake Michigan in far left, Glen Lake on right.

Once a canoe got way too close and we stood in the four-foot water for a while to let it get out of the way. As we neared Lake Michigan, the crowd of floaters got a lot more dense, mostly kids in plastic tubes accompanied by parents who were walking or floating alongside. At one point, we turned forward and did the breaststroke downstream to pass a particularly dense part of the crowd. But we were back to classic floating by the time we were washed into the lake. The first indication we hit the lake was that a small wave of water washed over us. It was interesting to feel our bodies moved about in conflicting currents while the water started to get rough. The water in the lake was cold enough to make the

river water feel like a bathtub. The conflicting currents splashed us alternately with warm and cold water until it all became cold and we knew we were entirely in Lake Michigan. We swam out into it and around a bit. It was the first time the water was over our heads. Then we walked out onto the sandy beach and back to our bench for lunch.

After lunch, some twelve-year-old girls next to us fed seagulls. So the birds started buzzing us. Jennifer spoke to the girls harshly, and they claimed that they tried to pick up the crackers they had thrown out, and then actually picked up those remaining, so the seagulls abated.



Looking down at Lake Michigan from the top of a 400 foot sand dune.

We sat watching the river and lake until it became overcast.

We went to the Maritime Museum on Sleeping Bear Point. It was an old Coast Guard Life Saving Station. We saw a video reenactment of a line throwing mortar. Then we saw a Ranger demonstrate the equipment with children as lifesaving crew extras. One of the children was designated as the sinking boat's captain. His mother beseeched the crowd for anyone to take a picture of him in his captain's hat, so Michael took her email address and several digital photos of the reenactment to send to her.

We went for dinner at a very progressive Italian restaurant, then had ice cream in Glen Arbor. We walked to the beach that we had seen from La Bear windows the night before. The sky was again too cloudy for a distinct sunset, but we enjoyed the pink window of color in the otherwise dull white sky. The sky faded to blue then gray but the pink window only got more brilliant until it too started

to fade and we went back to Maple Lane
to sleep.



Miles traveled: 346
Departure datetime: Sunday, July 28, 7:00AM
Departure weather: 76° Hazy Fog