

Paddling Around the Lake

Margy Holden and Cathy Frank

June 26, 2004

Notes at the beginning of the summer of 2004 and the start of our Journal

It all started innocently enough. Both long time summer residents of the Champlain Islands, in Vermont, Margy and I discovered several years ago that we both had a passion for kayaking and that we paddled at the same pace. We decided to try kayaking around Grand Isle, a large island in the middle of the northern part of Lake Champlain.

Grand Isle is comprised of two towns, Grand Isle and South Hero. Marge lives on the western shore of Grand Isle and I, on the south shore of South Hero. The difference in our lake exposure is important because it gives us totally different views and perspectives on this wonderful large, incredibly beautiful historic lake, the lake with a thousand views. It also gives us instant access to the two most critical weather shores to judge the weather benefits or drawbacks to kayaking on any given day. (On Lake Champlain the wind blows out of the east once in a blue moon and never stays there for very long.) The south shore of South Hero gets pounded with the prevailing south wind that races up the 120 mile length of the lake, funneled by the mountains on either side. The Adirondacks lie to the west and the Green Mountains of Vermont to the east. If there is a 10-20 MPH south wind forecast for Burlington you can count on 15-30 on the lake. However, as exposed as I am to the south wind, I am protected by a hill and a point of land from the west and northwest wind. I can hear them but I can't feel them. Marge gets those head on. We both, of course, underestimate the ferocity of the wind we are not exposed to, at least we did in the beginning. We learned quickly to respect each other's direct weather observations, even though some days we felt that we were not living on the same lake.

Clearly handicapped by an inability to accept the limitations aging bodies impose, and not being people prone to limiting challenges, before we were anywhere near paddling our way around Grand Isle (approximately 38 miles), we had enlarged our goal to kayaking around all of the major large islands in the northern part of the lake – Grand Isle, North Hero, and Isle La Motte (approximately 85 miles). Happily and a little sadly, we accomplished that goal in the summer of 2002. By the spring of 2003 we had decided that we wanted and needed to keep going and so the goal ballooned into paddling around the entire shoreline of Lake Champlain and its major islands, a total distance of over 600 miles! That escalation seemed a little extreme, even to me, but a wonderful idea just the same. What an excuse to leave behind all the things we should be doing and head out onto the lake where we really want to be! Lake Champlain is 120 miles long, 10 miles wide at its widest point, with a maximum depth at 400 feet. It is bordered by two states (New York and Vermont) and two countries (US and Canada).

This journal starts in the middle of that endeavor at the beginning of the summer of 2004. Our entries will go both forward and backward.

As should be obvious by now, ours is not a marathon journey to be completed in one fell swoop but rather a patchwork quilt of half and whole day trips taken when we were/are both free of adult children and grandchildren visits, other company, work, civic responsibilities and family, and on days when the wind and weather gods are kind. In many respects scheduling our trips has been the biggest challenge.

We are two fairly active “young women” in our 60s with more love of adventure than common sense might dictate at this point in our lives. We have no timeline to complete our journey but we do hope to finish while we are still able to load our kayaks on and off our car tops by ourselves.

So, without further reflection, let our story begin.