

Finding Ojibway

Through Georgian Bay's 30,000 Islands

By Craig Nicholson

Georgian Bay has always had a special mystique with its rugged, Group of Seven scenery. It's also a trailer boater's paradise. That's why we towed to Parry Sound last summer to cruise north among its 30,000 rugged islands, windswept shores and rock-cut channels towards Pointe au Baril Station. Parking our trucks and trailers at Glenn Burney Marina, Jim Heintzman, Tim and Liz West and I launched our four Sea-Doo personal watercraft for a day of fun on those sparkling waters.

Before starting, it's always a good idea to do a little orienteering. Using marine charts (even a good area map will do), we noted both our launch location and destination. We quickly discovered where Pointe au Baril (literally "Barrel Point", after the fire container that originally signalled shelter for mariners in the early 1800s) is located north of Parry Sound. With mainland to starboard and

Georgian Bay to port for our entire outbound journey, all we had to do was follow the plentiful navigation markers. That's not to say that there aren't a thousand or more islets, shoals, passages and inlets to confuse the issue, but we'd be okay remembering that Pointe au Baril is north and Parry Sound is south...and that Parry Island (First Nation Reserve) is a huge piece of real estate that sits between the Town of Parry Sound and the full force of Georgian Bay.

Our ultimate destination wasn't exactly Pointe au Baril. No, we were searching for the famous Ojibway Club. Built as a grand resort hotel in 1906, this rustic, rambling edifice, with its gabled roofs, imposing tower, sweeping stone steps and broad veranda, magnificently harkens back to the glory of a by-gone era. Rescued from likely ruin by local cottagers in the sixties, the Ojibway Club now operates a ten-week season each summer (June 30 - August 22) as a social and recreational centre for Port au Baril's



The Ojibway Club is a hive of activity for July and August each summer.

island archipelago community of cottagers. With docking, fuel and food available, the Ojibway Club is a must-visit destination for runabouts, personal watercraft (PWCs) and other small boats. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Our Adventure Begins

Turning starboard out of Glenn Burney Marina, we cruised under the swing bridge that connects Rose Point to Parry Island. It also acts as the southern gateway to the Parry Sound harbour. We spent a few moments exploring the town's waterfront, before heading through the channel that opens up into the larger bay called Parry Sound. A

Canadian Coast Guard detachment is located on your starboard side. Heading west, we stayed closer to Parry Island on our portside to avoid inadvertently getting off course amid the myriad of islands and small bays that dot the mainland to starboard. Where Parry Sound narrows, we had Killbear Provincial Park to starboard and Parry Island to port – and straight ahead, almost due west, was wide-open Georgian Bay, all the way to Tobermory. We didn't go there!

I should comment at this point that this is not a journey for a windy day because blowing air churns big waves. Although

much of this trip sticks to protected channels and waterways, two locations (this is one) are exposed to the big waters of Georgian Bay, which can be rough if it's windy. All of these waterways are also host to many large cruisers, most of which can throw out an intimidating wake as they pass. Mind you, on a PWC, any waves can be a blast when you're fit, experienced and wearing a PFD, but the big ones are no family ride!

Even the inland waters of Georgian Bay made me feel small on my 3-seater Sea-Doo. Everything here – water, shorelines, and land mass – seemed larger than life. The scenery was spectacular and on this sunny day, the waters were relatively calm, twinkling with highlights, as if some fairy princess had scattered handfuls of glitter to becalm the surface.

Approaching Ojibway

Once through the Parry Sound narrows, we avoided most waves by bearing to starboard and following the markers closer to shore. They took us behind several islands and into the Shebeshe-kong Channel. After a hard turn to port at its end, we soon emerged into the second, exposed-to-Georgian Bay section at the mouth of Shawanaga Inlet. But

once into this Inlet, it was a straight run to the Middle Channel that leads to the Ojibway Club.

It sneaks up on you. The Ojibway Club is tucked into the north side of a larger and same-named island, shielded from sight of the Middle Channel by a smaller islet. One minute it's not visible and the next, the Ojibway Club is suddenly revealed in all its astonishing glory like an enchanted castle plunked into the middle of nowhere! What a hive of activity with dozens of boats coming and going and at least a hundred folks bustling about!

After a leisurely lunch and a stroll around its grounds and dockside shops, we retraced our course home. It was still mid-afternoon when we approached the Parry Sound narrows and we figured it was too early to head back the way we had come. So we decided to circumnavigate Parry Island counter clockwise.

Around Parry Island

Remember, I noted earlier that Parry Island shields the Town of Parry Sound from Georgian Bay. This means we could get back to town either directly from the north (the reverse course of our outbound journey), or by going the long



Cruising in the calm waters of the large bay known as Parry Sound.

way, south around the island and approaching Parry Sound via the South Channel. So we turned to starboard before the Parry Sound narrows at Rose Island and headed into the Waubuno Channel on the Georgian Bay side of Parry Island. This channel was less sheltered than the previous ones, but on this calm day, our cruise around Parry Island was smooth sailing. By following the Parry Island shore and continually angling to port, we soon picked up the markers leading from Georgian Bay to the South Channel. From there, we were in protected waters as we followed the markers all the way back to Glenn Burney Marina.

What a great day's ride! Even on this weekday, many other boaters and numerous shoreline cottages would have provided us with information or assistance if it had been needed. Consequently, we boated without a care and thoroughly enjoyed our PWC adventure. As we cruised along at about 40 mph, I kept thinking about those voyageurs of old, paddling their guts out to traverse these same big waters. Believe me, Georgian Bay is a whole lot easier on a Sea-Doo! ●

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