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Greece couple trawls America's Great Loop

Bob and Sue Hogeman traveled nation's waterways

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GREECE — Somewhere around the Statue of Liberty in early July, Bob and Sue Hogeman crossed their own wake.

Passing through New York Harbor on their trawler The Tom-Kat, the Hogemans completed their first boat trip around America's Great Loop — the Atlantic and Gulf Intracoastal Waterways, the Great Lakes, the Canadian Heritage Canals and the inland river systems. The total loop is about 6,500 miles.

They started their trip on June 25, 2007, from Sodus Bay.

From there, they traveled to Georgian Bay, then to Chicago and, eventually, the Mississippi River. They went down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico, wintered in Florida, then worked their way up the East Coast.

"It was wonderful," said Sue Hogeman.

"We really got to see parts of the country you don't see from the highway."

The Hogemans, both retired, have long been interested in boating.

Bob Hogeman says he started building kit boats when he was 8 or 9 years old.

When the two were first married, they purchased a small sailboat to use on the Finger Lakes.

When their children headed off to college, they got interested in sailing again and bought a new boat to use on Lake Ontario.

But then Bob Hogeman bought a copy of Ron and Eva Stob's *Honey, Let's Buy a Boat*. The book chronicles the Stobs' yearlong trip through the Great Loop.

"It was a fascinating read," he said. "They were really the pioneers in long-distance river cruising, and we fell in love with that idea. Since we were both retired, we decided to work our way toward it with some smaller, extended summer cruises."

For their yearlong trip, the Hogeman's earned their "BaccaLooperate" degree from America's Great Loop Cruisers' Association.

And every step of the way was chronicled by Sue Hogeman in her blog, Tom-Kat Trawler.

She said the trip was well worth it.

"You really meet the nicest people," she said.

During their many miles on the Mississippi, their travels through the industrial sections of the Illinois River, a sojourn into Lake Superior — only so they could say they've been in all five Great Lakes — the Hogemans gained a new perspective.

"A real highlight for me was going through downtown Chicago, under all the bridges," said Sue Hogeman.

"It was about 8:30 a.m. and there's a place where you go under 24 bridges ... we have a picture of the boat with the Sears tower behind it. That was fascinating."

Bob Hogeman said finishing the trip was almost bittersweet.

"You think about it and plan for this thing for so long and then it's over," he said.

"But there's a zillion more places to continue to cruise."

In early August, The Tom-Kat was in dry dock in Connecticut, getting a few repairs and a check-up after the Great Loop trip.

But the Hogemans plan to get back on the water as soon as they can.

"We're going to head south to Florida and maybe go to the Bahamas," Sue Hogeman said. "But as boaters say, 'all plans are written in sand at low tide.'"

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