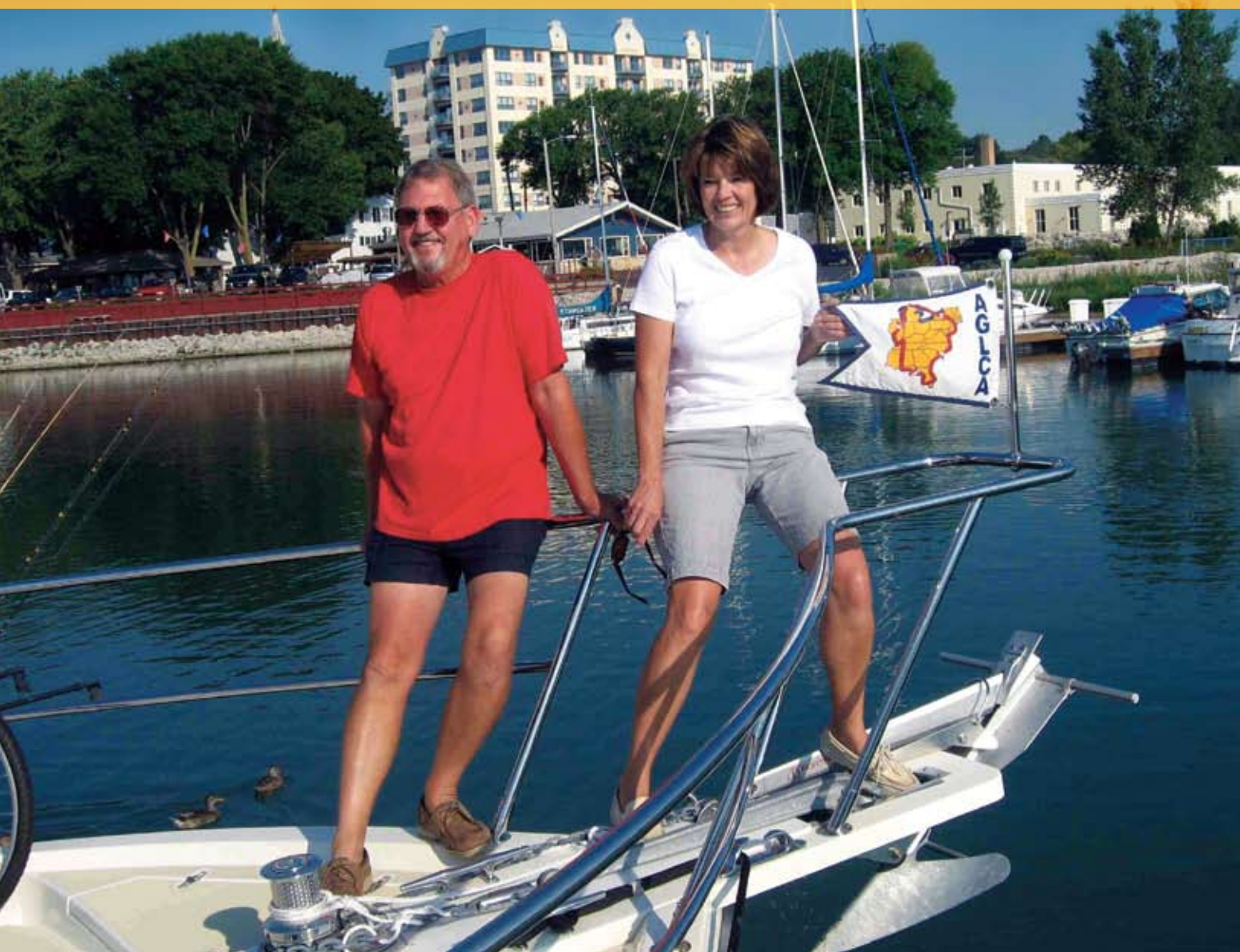


cruising with marinalife

# The Great Loop

The Great Loop is the continuous waterway that encompasses the eastern portion of North America – including the Atlantic and Gulf Intracoastal Waterways, the Great Lakes, the Canadian Heritage Canals, and the inland rivers of America’s heartland. It is also known as the Great Circle Route and is considered one of the safest long distance cruising routes in the world. To travel all or a portion of the Great Loop or any of its magnificent side trips is an adventure of a lifetime and one that Marinalife members Sally and Oliver Miller and their dog, Marina, embarked on after 5 years of planning on their vessel Oliver II. The following is a journal of their trip to date.



On September 3, 2007, at exactly 9:00a.m., after a champagne toast with 28 of our friends, we cast off our lines for a trip that would take us through 16 states, 2 different countries, and every imaginable type of waterway. We traveled about 5300 miles over a ten-month period.

The details for planning this trip seemed endless, from gathering all the charts, chips and guide books, to arranging for our house to be occupied while we were gone, making sure our bills could be paid on-line, contacting doctors, our attorney, our financial planner, our dog Marina's vet, our insurance agent, etc. etc. ETC! The biggest decision was which boat would be most suitable. This topic is sure to spark controversy so let me just say that, for us, a Sabre 47' Motoryacht was the ideal boat. We took delivery of our new boat, One Oliver II, in Sandy Hook, New Jersey, in June 2006. We spent that summer on a shake-down cruise to Maine and back to Connecticut, where we left our vessel for the winter. We returned in May 2007 and spent the next three weeks cruising the Hudson River, Erie Canal, Lake Erie, the St. Clair River and Lake St. Clair, Lake Huron and finally Lake Michigan to our home in Port Washington, Wisconsin.

The first 2 months of our trip carried us from Port Washington to Mobile, Alabama via Lake Michigan, the Chicago, Illinois, Mississippi, Ohio and Tennessee Rivers and the Tennessee-Ton Bigbee Waterway. As Great Lakes cruisers, the river system was a new experience for us. The massive tows-a-tug and barge combination (called a tow) were amazing to us. The largest we encountered was a tow with 30 barges, but there are even larger combinations. There is a well-defined protocol for negotiating a pass with these giants and they are usually very helpful but it can be quite intimidating. One of our most memorable experiences occurred when we "shared" a lock with the front 6 barges of a 12 barge tow. The tow captains and lockmasters are very professional and do all they can to take care of us PCs



*Our friends see us off on our 10 month trip*

(pleasure craft) or RVers (recreational vehicles)!

There are relatively few marinas on the river system and we found ourselves meeting other Loopers at every stop. At one anchorage on the Mississippi, there were 10 of us sharing the limited space one night. We all travel at different speeds so at times we re-connected with our new friends 3 or 4 months after meeting them for the first time.

There is much history to explore as one moves south, from historic battlefields to beautiful antebellum homes. Most of the marinas offer a courtesy car for exploration and, more importantly, for the critical trips to Wal-Mart! This is a favorite destination of every Looper and we often found ourselves sharing the courtesy car with several strangers, or as we like to say, "friends-we-hadn't-met-yet".

Our insurance company required us to remain north of the 32nd parallel until November 1st. On that day there were 13 boats heading south from Demopolis, Alabama! We arrived in Mobile on November 2, after 61 days (20 of which were actual travel days), 1344

statute miles and 115 hours under way. After a few days' rest, we were ready to start the next part of our journey.

We crossed a choppy Mobile Bay, dotted with oil platforms, and entered the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway. With a few notable exceptions, the entire loop can be completed within sight of land in protected waters. We visited Gulf Shores, Alabama, Pensacola and Destin, Florida and arrived in Carrabelle, Florida. This was our jumping off point to cross the Gulf of Mexico to the West Coast of Florida. This is a major step for all Loopers because of the open water distance. We crossed from Carrabelle to Dunedin, a distance of 183 miles. Making our way down the coast was easy and we enjoyed the dolphins and pelicans that traveled with us most days.

We reached Key West, our southernmost destination, on November 29. We were now 2078 miles from home and when we left after our one-month stay, we would be headed home! Key West is a most unique port, with a busy waterfront, daily visits from huge cruise ships, and a free spirit atmosphere. We enjoyed celebrating the holidays in Key West and appreciated visits from

family and friends. Arranging visits can be a real challenge as our schedule changes with the weather and our whim. But with an understanding of the limitations, we were able to enjoy many guests.

The new year found us moving north through the Keys towards Palm Beach. We waited for the perfect weather window to cross the Gulf Stream to the Bahamas. Although a relatively short distance of about 65 miles from our North Palm Beach marina to Old Bahama Bay in West End, Grand Ba-

hamas Island, this journey is not to be taken lightly. The current in the Gulf Stream can run as fast as 5 knots and with an opposing north wind, the waves can quickly build to dangerous heights. We waited for 13 days and enjoyed a very comfortable crossing.

We spent two months in the Bahamas with highlights including our stay at the Abaco Boat Harbour in Marsh Harbour, Abaco, Bahamas and visits to several other Cays (pronounced Keys). We were lucky enough to attend a Junkanoo, which is a musical,

dance and costume parade that is a Bahamian tradition. As dog lovers, we were enchanted by the Potcake dogs, semi-stray dogs named for the crust that forms on the bottom of cooking pots that is scraped out for the dogs. The (mostly) yellow dogs are gentle and friendly and we loved seeing them all over town. Our dog, Marina, had a special doggy friend who lived at the dive shop located near our boat.

Alas, our time flew by and we began to watch for another weather window. Between Marsh Harbour and West End



*Beach at Guana Cay, Abaco, Bahamas*



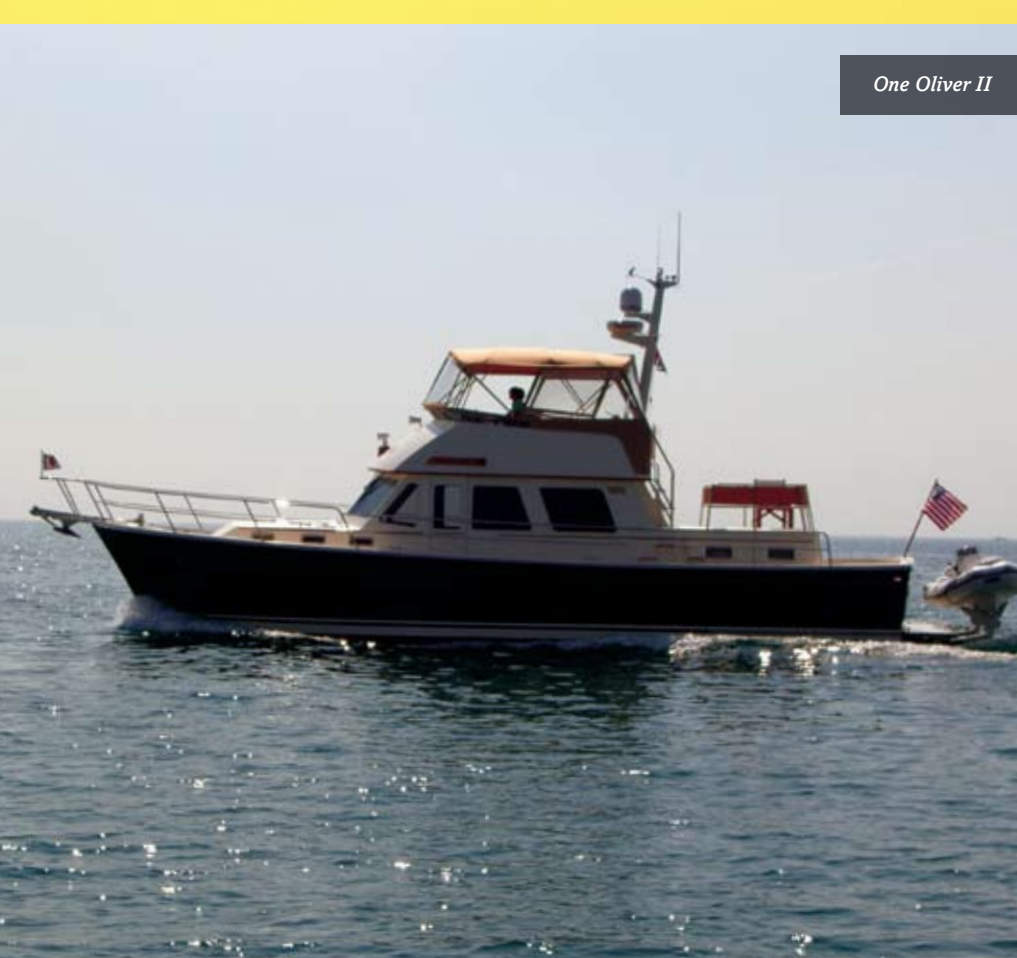
*Key West*

lies Whale Cay and boats with more than a 3-foot draft must travel through a channel into the Atlantic, pass by Whale Cay, and come back into the Sea of Abaco through another channel. This journey can be a frightening and dangerous undertaking in any north wind and can be impossible when strong winds cause a “rage” in the channel. We encountered rough but manageable water in both directions as we crossed the Whale.

On March 29, we arrived back in Palm Beach. Boaters traveling to the Bahamas should be aware of the Local Boater Option. By visiting the Customs and Border Protection office prior to leaving the States, only a phone call is required upon return. Without this prior approval, you are required to appear at the office in person within 24 hours of arriving in the US.

For the next month we enjoyed stops in Ft. Pierce, Cocoa Village, Daytona Beach, St. Augustine and Fernandina Beach, Florida, as well as Hilton Head, Charleston, Georgetown and Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Each of these ports provided its own sightseeing opportunities. Our travels have included the Atlantic Ocean as well as the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. We are currently at the Myrtle Beach Yacht Club awaiting a visit from son John, who will be home on leave from Iraq.

We had a wonderful visit with John and his sister Debbie and then it was time to move on. We passed through the Sunset Beach Pontoon bridge, the last of its type on the ICW. We visited Wrightsville Beach and Beaufort, NC and then spent a week at Jarrett Bay Boat Works having routine maintenance performed. While there, Oliver caught a bug and was quite ill for over a week. This is a situation you hope won't happen but on a trip this long, is almost inevitable. During our 9 months away, all of us have visited a doctor, hospital or veterinarian! On a happier note, we also found a lot in Port Vandemere, NC and the dock will be done by the end of summer - looks like another long trip for next summer!



*One Oliver II*

Upon leaving the Beaufort area, we had several nice days cruising up the ICW, visiting Belhaven, Coinjock and finally Portsmouth, VA. The Naval Shipyards in Portsmouth and Hampton Roads are so impressive and we especially enjoyed touring the USS Wisconsin- a little bit of home! We would have liked to spend more time on the Chesapeake Bay but we are yearning for home. We went onto the C&D Canal and had our most challenging situation. The waves on the Delaware River were much bigger than expected and 20 miles out of Cape May, the lift holding our dinghy snapped two stainless steel bolts. To save the dinghy and prevent damage to the One Oliver II, Oliver donned a life jacket, went out on the swim platform, cut the dinghy loose and attached it to a line. A wonderful couple on a sailboat saw what was happening and offered to stand by until all was under control - boaters are most generous with their time and assistance. We managed to tow the dinghy into Cape May where Oliver repaired the lift. We moved on to Atlantic City and on June 7th we passed our original starting point, thus completing the Loop!

We traveled 5541 miles in 409 hours. Although from start to finish, the trip encompassed 375 days, we actually only traveled 76 of those days. Our average was 73 miles per day or 5 travel hours. We traversed 58 locks. We still have 1000 miles to go and hope to be back in Port Washington before the end of June.

It is hard to believe that this trip, so long in the planning, is almost over. We learned much about our boat but even more about ourselves. We are more resilient, patient, creative, and resourceful than we realized. We cannot express our appreciation for our fellow Loopers, our friends and family who visited with us by email, phone and in person, Marinalife for providing invaluable information and support and for making countless reservations (and changes) for us, and especially God for bringing us safely through both calm and rough seas. The de-

tails and MANY pictures of our trip are available on our blog at [www.oneoliverii.com](http://www.oneoliverii.com). We are most willing to offer any advice to current or future Loopers.

We were asked what our overall thoughts were on the trip and we think these words sum it up: It was everything we expected. It was more than we expected. It was nothing like we expected. 