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Local boaters take a year to circle eastern North America

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For years we've boated on Lakes Loudoun and Tellico, and when we vacation it's usually somewhere by the water. It came as a logical progression for us to want to spend a year traveling on the Great Loop.

Our Great Loop trip took us from Fort Loudoun Lake to Mobile, Key West, up the east coast to New York City, then across Canada including Montreal, Ottawa, Georgian Bay, the North Channel of Lake Huron, then south across Lake Michigan to Chicago, and down a system of six rivers back to Knoxville. It was a yearlong journey of 6,800 miles. We passed through 128 locks and used 4,400 gallons of diesel fuel.

We bought our boat, Segue, in 2003. The boat is a 43-foot 1984 Californian trawler. We traveled to Florida and chartered a boat before buying so that we'd know what we wanted. We came away looking for a queen size bed (or larger), a covered deck for rainy days and a galley that was separate from the living area.

We refurbished the boat over the next four years and during that time started researching the Great Loop. We joined America's Great Loop Cruisers Association (www.greatloop.org) and, in addition to attending a couple of their meetings, we started monitoring e-mail discussion lists sponsored by that group and other cruising boater groups.

Once we were both retired in April 2007, we knew it was time to make our move. During the months leading up to our October 2007 departure we fine-tuned the boat, took a navigation class from the Knoxville Power Squadron, gathered supplies, planned our route, found a house-sitter and forwarded our mail. Friends asked why we weren't going to "try it out" first for a couple of months to see how we liked life on the water. We decided it was just as much trouble to close up house for a couple of months as it was for a year ... and we were determined to do the Loop!

The trip was everything we thought it would be, and more. The lowlight came the first day of the trip when we discovered a leaking fuel tank. It caused a two-month delay in our departure, but finally the problem was fixed and we were on our way. There were many highlights, but we both agree we'll never forget our emotional high coming into New York harbor with the Statue of Liberty on one side and the Manhattan skyline on the other.

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