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News

Villagers took their catamaran on a yearlong adventure around the Great Loop

By AZIA LI FORREST, DAILY SUN

THE VILLAGES — It took Paul and Susan Morel, of the Village of Bonnybrook, a year and about 6,300 miles to travel the Great Loop in their catamaran.

Now that they are back, they realize how much the trip has changed their lives.

"People forget how wonderful this country is," Susan said.

How it began

A few years ago, Susan read "Honey, Let's get a Boat," by Ron and Eva Stob, a guide to sailing the Great Loop.

"It inspired many people to do this trip," she said.

The authors founded America's Great Looping Cruisers' Association in 1999, an organization that provides cruising information on traveling along the waters of eastern North America.

Because the Morels already had their own PDQ power catamaran, which they dock in Beaufort, N.C., they decided to embark on a journey. Their adventure began in March 2007 at Marathon in the Florida Keys, and they even took their dog, Shadow, along for the ride.

"It was like I retired in January, and we took off," Susan said. "Our life was a series of adventures."

But they didn't take the trip alone. Having joined AGLCA, they sailed along with other "Loopers."

"Last year, there were about 111 boats from all over the country and Canada doing the trip," Susan said. "There's a lot of camaraderie in the group. We also had rendezvous throughout the year along the loop."

In planning the trip,

the Morels said, timing is everything.

"You wouldn't do this trip in November or the winter," Susan said. "You don't want to be in the cold. April or May is a good time. You're exploring."

The route

They traveled along the coast on the Intercoastal Waterway, a protected waterway, and explored different communities.

"We had books that would tell us, like for instance Palm Beach, the points of interests and museums," she said. "We would bike, take a bus, or if we were at a marina, we would meet people who had a car. It was a real sense of adventure."

There was no rush to complete the trip. When they came to a place they really liked, they would stay for a few days.

"St. Augustine has so





NSDQ	2280.11	(-1.97%)
NYSE	8369.91	(-2.46%)
S&P 500	1252.54	(-2.31%)
AMEX	2124.38	(-1.55%)
RUS 2K	702.39	(-2.34%)
Crude Oil	125.67	(+0.00%)
30YR Yield	4.68	(+0.43%)

Quotes delayed at least 20 mins.

Market Summary

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much history," she said.

"Jekyll Island, Ga., was just wonderful."

They spent the Memorial Day weekend in Norfolk, Va., and a couple of weeks in Chicago to celebrate Labor Day.

"There was so much to explore in the Chesapeake Bay," Susan said. "We entered the back way through these places. It was like a new

experience."

"We had a ball," she said. "It was wilderness on a boat."

One of the biggest surprises, they said, was New Jersey.

"(It) had a lot of beach communities — a lot of boating going on," Paul said.

As they made their way back west, they traveled along the Tennessee River en route to Mobile, Ala. Once they were in the Gulf of Mexico, no longer in a protected waterway, they had to pay attention to the weather.

From Mobile Bay, they made their way back to Florida through the Panhandle. Then they traveled down the west coast of Florida to Marathon.

Susan said that their boat, named "Sweet Dreams," was an advantage throughout the trip.

"Our boat acts as a hotel," she said. "Everyone had a variety of boats, but the beauty of our boat was that it's 34 feet long, 17 feet wide, and it has a 2-foot draft. The draft allowed us to get into shallow-water areas that other people didn't have the opportunity to."

Looking back

Susan said the best part of the trip was the exploring.

"If you watch television, it's very negative," she said. "If you can learn to put it away, you can see what's out there. It's like walking the pages of a history book. We were not experienced sailors. Anyone can do it."

Once they completed the Great Loop, they were given a certificate and a gold AGLCA flag to fly on their boat.

For their next trip, the couple said they plan to explore the St. Johns River in Florida, which flows from Indian River County northward to the Atlantic Ocean at Jacksonville.

"It's the adventure of what's around the corner," Paul said. "There's so much history."

For more information on sailing the Great Loop, visit greatloop.com.

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