



## Paddling with Chuck...

First in a Series

# Touring the Canadian St. Lawrence Islands National Park

by Chuck Sutherland

**A**t the end of May, the trillium will be blooming on Sugar Island. The water will be cold, usually about 50 degrees F. I remember a year when we were the first campers of the season to land on Canoe Beach. The meadow there had not a single footpath beaten across its two-foot high grasses. The carpet of tall dandelions had all gone to seed puffs, and clouds of them floated off with each step we took across the meadow. The trillium blooms on the forest floor in middle of the island; columbine blooms along the cliffs and rocks around the edge of the island. My wife and I have been paddling among the islands surrounding SI for about 15 years. Here are a few of the day trips we particularly enjoy.

### Crossing to Sugar Island

We paddle out to Sugar Island (SI) from Misty Isles Lodge (MIL) on the Canadian shore of the St. Lawrence River. Our two-mile route passes between two small islands about a quarter mile out and then along the east side of Gordon Island, one of the islands in the Canadian St. Lawrence Islands National Park. At the south end of Gordon, we make a jump across a major boating channel to Squaw Island and then on to SI.

The prevailing wind around SI is southwest. Waves build up nicely over the three-mile fetch southwest of Gordon. On one memorable day, our party of five sea kayaks and three canoes launched

from MIL into a rigorous southwest breeze. Two of the canoes landed on one of the islands just off MIL. Two of our kayakers turned back when they got about halfway between there and Gordon. The third canoe landed on Gordon Island. They said the waves in the channel off the end of Gordon looked really big!

So, off to the races! We ferried across the 2-3 foot waves rolling up the channel, sprinted into the lee of Squaw Island and soon landed at Canoe Beach. An hour later, the white water canoeists on Gordon couldn't stand being left behind by sea kayakers, and they followed us across to SI. The other paddlers were all well seasoned and able to make their own decisions. They paddled out the next day in better weather.

Due to border issues after 9-11, paddlers should not launch from the U.S. side of the border to paddle among the islands on the Canadian side of the St. Lawrence River (see SI website for directions).

### Paddling North to Landon's Bay

Landon's Bay is three miles north of SI. There is a massive granite ridge on its west side. From the nearby road, or even the middle of the bay, it just looks like a quiet pond surrounded by cattails. A surprise is hidden in the back of the bay. A narrow fiord-like canyon runs out toward the northwest. A series of horizontal grooves are carved into its vertical west wall. The canyon is clothed in a forest of white pine and hemlock. Its

habitat is ecologically quite different than that found on SI. It is a unique pocket wilderness.

On SI we have crows, house wrens, robins and yellow warblers in the summer months. In the canyon, I have found ravens, veerys, winter wrens, and black-throated green warblers in the canyon forest. I have also seen mink, porcupines, water snakes, and wood ducks there. At the head of the canyon, there is a small water fall, a fine spot to get out of the boats, eat lunch and hike around a bit.

A quarter mile above the waterfall the streambed, on my first visit, opened into a wide meadow with some dead trees around its edge. It appeared to be a former beaver pond. A few years later, I was excited to find a pond, beaver lodge, and massive beaver dam.

### Toward the West

Paddling southwest from SI takes you past Camelot (park island) and numerous smaller islands. When the wind is blowing hard from the southwest, this route offers considerable cover for several different day trips. After crossing a major boat channel a short distance west of Camelot, one soon arrives at the entrance to an extensive freshwater marsh that reaches back a mile or more into Grindstone Island (U.S. territory). We once found a loon nest on a platform at the wide entrance to that marsh. The nest had a sign near it warning boaters to keep clear. The cattails in the marsh were alive

## If You Go...

The Canadian St. Lawrence Islands National Park canoe and kayak trail was established in 1999. A free (pdf) guide book can be downloaded from their website ([www.paddle1000.com](http://www.paddle1000.com)). Trail maps 4, 5, and 6 in that booklet cover the sections described here. Be sure to read the rules regarding crossing the U.S./Canadian border in your boat. This is now a big deal and can be complicated for paddlers. Details are reviewed on the Park website. For additional information about Sugar Island, please visit the SI website at [www.dreamscape.com/kkemp/sugar](http://www.dreamscape.com/kkemp/sugar) or e-mail questions to M. Vogel at [seashell@entermail.net](mailto:seashell@entermail.net). SI is the property of the American Canoe Association and is open to all ACA members April through October. Misty Isles Lodge, (613) 382-4232, is located on route 25, six miles west of the international bridges, and one mile west of the small bridge crossing the entrance to Landon's Bay. Just beyond this bridge, there is a roadside parking area where you can hand launch canoes or kayaks for local day trips.

The NOAA charts for this region of the St Lawrence, #s 14766, 14767 and 14773, are usually available in the marine stores in Clayton, N.Y. The comparable Canadian charts are #s 1419 and 1420. The "Fishing Hot Spots" chart for the St. Lawrence River, Central region is a fine waterproof chart for this area, and "Waterproof Charts" #78, "The Thousand Islands" is also great for use in our small (wet) boats.

with redwings and long-billed marsh wrens. We saw a great horned owl sitting on a branch of a long dead tree near the water. Here and there we saw large, clear depressions in the weeds growing on the bottom of the channel. Huge carp cruised through these holes and away under our boats. Muskrat houses were scattered through the marsh.

### Toward the East

We often run trips down stream from SI. That would be east toward the international bridges that cross from Hill Island to the Canadian mainland. On one such foray, we paddled through the narrow channel between Owen and Spilsbury Islands. There was a substantial great blue heron rookery in the trees on both sides of the waterway. At the entrance to the canal, we found another active loon nest built a couple inches above water level and within a few inches of the water's edge. We gave it a wide berth. An osprey platform near there had a young eagle on it and a noisy, unhappy osprey circling around it.

About 1.7 miles west of the bridges, the north channel of the St Lawrence narrows rather abruptly as it runs through many tight passages surrounding a dozen or more small islands. We usually take a lunch break on Georgina Island (Park island). One of the largest Park campgrounds is on the mainland, just west of the international bridges running over Georgina Island. The first couple miles on the return trip to SI are a lot like work due to the strong currents in the narrow channels. If that southwest wind is alive, guess what - more work! But, hard paddling is good, Right?



*The "Indian Rocks" wall, about 70-80 feet high, guards the entrance to the canyon running out behind Landon's Bay. The picture is from a postcard mailed Aug. 17, 1911. Postage at the time was One Cent. The cliff hasn't changed any since the picture was taken. The old timers say there is a native pictograph somewhere on that wall.*

