
The Shallow Water Sailor

Number 188

A simple boat, a bit of marsh, a redwing's song, and a friend or two

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Lifelong Sailor Switches To A Motor Vessel

by Moby Nick Scheuer

"Is that an Albin?" We would hear that from three individuals on this, our first real cruise in the Du NORD, a Diesel-powered Albin-25 built in Sweden in 1976. The fellow strolling into our Thunder Bay KOA campsite was merely the first.

We had been two hours away from our destination at Nipigon, ON, and also two hours away from sunset. When we passed the KOA, I proposed that we spend the night there, and launch in the morning, when we would be fresh, but where to turn our rig around? Just then a wide spot appeared in the road, a wide arc of paved shoulder, mirrored by another on the opposite side. We later learned that these "wide spots in the road" are turnarounds for snow plows.

Our visitor told us that he lived at the KOA for six months each year so he could be near his grandchildren and sailing out of Thunder Bay. The other six months he wintered in Florida. He inquired whether I had a chart, and I quickly spread one across the picnic table. I pointed to several likely anchorages along the south shores of St Ignace Island, facing Lake Superior, in answer to his, "Where to you plan to go?" He replied, "Well, those are all the best places. Your only problem will be not being able to resist returning next year."

"Be sure to stop here, it's called CPR Slip." He told us it was originally a fish camp built by the Canadian Pacific Railroad in the early 1900's for entertaining important guests. Later, they more or less abandoned it after the fishing died out. Then some volunteers in Thunder Bay got permission to rebuild the camp with new piers, a couple of new buildings, and new latrines. "You'll be welcomed there."

"I hope my next boat is an Albin just like yours. A nice Cruising Motor Boat was what I had in mind when I decided to get into boating, but all my friends urged me to get a sailboat instead." One of those friends in Thunder Bay owns an Albin-25 Motor Sailer.

The KOA campsite was the first test away from home for our dog, Ginger [see Ginger's new "staircase"]. Earlier I had planned to haul her aboard using a tackle fastened to her personal flotation device; one with good support for her belly, not just a couple of straps. However, when watching her at home tearing up and down our stairs with ease, the idea of a staircase for the boat seemed like a much better idea. Besides, it's more convenient than a 6' ladder for Gayle and me too. I used a light-weight aluminum extension ladder for the frame, bolted the halves together with rungs staggered at a 45-degree attitude, then added larger stair treads made of ¾" cedar. At the top, one side hooks onto the rub rail while the other side is supported by a vertical post. The ladder's position relative to the hull is reversible, fore-n-aft, as well as adaptable either port or starboard, depending on the site. How does Ginger like it? As with most things, she cooperates eagerly. The ladder is transported under the boat on the trailer.

I've been messing around in boats since I was five years old. A story here in MAIB some thirty years ago told how a friend and I found a derelict plywood dinghy on Chicago's Touhy Ave Beach. A subsequent MAIB article told how at age ten my father and I rebuilt the dinghy as a sailboat, the NIPPER. One thing Dad taught my brothers and I from the very first was that sailboats and canoes were far superior to motor boats.

My family has cruised waters all over the USA in the Shearwater Yawl, TRUE NORTH, and before that



in the Dovekie, PILGRIM PELICAN, starting in 1982. One of my brothers owns a Compac-23, another races radio-controlled model sloops. My son, Dave, has had a Hobie-16. One of my daughters has owned a couple of sailboats, the other belonged to a Sailing Program at Graduate School. Du NORD truly represents a watershed departure from a lot of history for me.

I once lived in Duluth for a year, a year of lasting memories of that grand city, so a rest stop overlooking Lake Superior was a must. Approaching Nipigon, I wondered whether evidence of the Holling Clancy Holling childrens' book Paddle To The Sea

would be evident in the town Nipigon along the Nipigon River. Indeed it is; they have a Paddle To The Sea walking trail which leads through town and down to a riverfront park. That book was a family favorite for my three children. It tells of an Ojibwa boy who learns about the St Lawrence Seaway in school and undertakes to carve a foot-long wooden model of a canoe and paddler, which he launches in a creek flowing into Lake Nipigon near his village, certain it will "paddle to the sea". Various people along the Seaway find the little wooden canoe and put it back in the water. One such person adds an engraved metal nameplate because the original carved note on the bottom of the canoe was badly weathered. Much later, years maybe, a deckhand on a fishing vessel in the North Atlantic extracts the little wooden canoe from their net and reads "Paddle To The Sea, Nipigon, Ontario" on the engraving.

Dave and I once made a crude model of our own Paddle To The Sea. We nailed an aluminum plate to the bottom identifying our home in Michigan City, IN and threw it into Lake Michigan. A year or so later someone phoned from 40 miles west to say they'd found our "Paddle To The Sea".

In Nipigon they sell plastic recreations of Paddle-To-The-Sea, and of course, I had to bring one home. Here are some photos of a wooden reproduction:

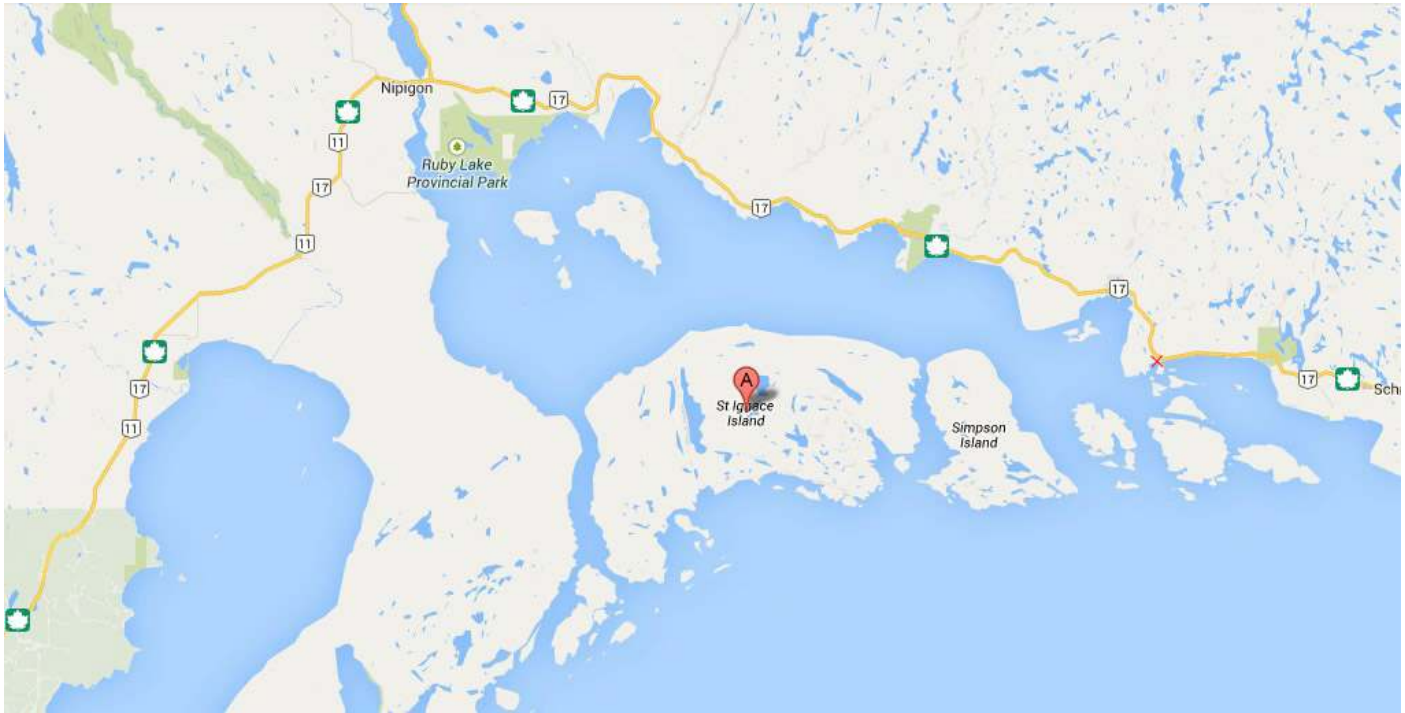


The launch fee at the Park was more than fair, with no extra charge for a week's parking for our truck and trailer. I enjoyed seeing the Cessna-172 Floatplane in the parking lot; typical Canada.

Our 35hp Volvo-Penta Diesel purring under our feet, we struck out south, across the west end of Nipigon Bay, bound for CPR Slip on the far side of St Ignace Is, tucked around a corner sheltered from Lk Superior. Too late we realized that our course through Blind Channel might not be deep enough for the Albin's 26-inch draft; with water depth noted in meters, there appeared to be a lot of "0's" all over the Channel. Old habits engrained over 18 years of cruising in the Shearwater Yawl, TRUE NORTH with her 6-inch draft, simply must change. At one point we slowed to a creep, rocky bottom in plain sight, employing our boat hook as a sounding pole. We never touched; close, but no "bump". Fortunately, our 16" prop is well-protected in an aperture between skeg and rudder. Still, a steel ring, similar to the ringed cages found under Lobster Boats would be welcome. It might even feature a foil section in order to minimize drag.

The Albin's single screw had been one of my objectives instead of a steerable prop as with an outboard motor or I-O when selecting a Motor Vessel. Ever since witnessing the way Lobstermen in Maine make their boats fairly dance, I've wanted to try my hand at it. Now that I've had some practice, I no longer approach a pier in trepidation. I'm getting better.

CPR Slip was everything our friend in Thunder Bay had promised. Worshipers in attendance when we arrived included a large Catamaran, a tri, and a pair of Motor Vessels we discovered to be typical in these waters, converted steel Fishing Trawlers of about 40ft LOA. One was powered by the same engine we have in our Dodge truck, a 5.9L Cummins Diesel. Their Skippers do not sport gold chains around their necks. After tying up to a vacant pier, one of them walked over to give us a rundown on the facilities.



Northern Section of Lake Superior - See Nipigon, north along Route 17, and St. Ignace Island, at center.

CPR Slip is a long, narrow, "slip-like" cove described by a narrow peninsula forming a "hook" parallel to the shore of St Ignace Is. The outermost one-third is more or less devoid of vegetation like the trees and bush flourishing on the inner portion.

As it seemed to consist of stone similar to railroad track ballast, it must have been built by the CP. Gayle wondered how that might be accomplished in this remote area? I pointed out that if the CP main line was only 15 miles away, and if they could build a railroad through the Canadian Rockies, lengthening this peninsula would be just a walk in the park. Several barges full of stone, a steam shovel to unload them with, and teams of horses to grade it all would be common materials employed by the CP every day. A flag pole flying the Maple Leaf Flag stands proud at the end of the peninsula.

Our next two days steaming east along the Lake Superior side of the islands describing Nipigon Bay found the often boisterous Lake as benign as I have ever seen her. The anchorage in McNab Harbor at the SE end of St Ignace was one of delightful solitude and calm. The Cove featured a tight entrance from the Lake, deep enough, but one wherein you actually have to pay close attention when navigating the entrance. We all enjoyed a long walk around the stony shore, collecting a few prime pieces of driftwood for mounting my bird carvings.

A stop at Battle Is. to see the Light House offered another lesson in Albin-25 versus Shearwater Yawl. For a number of years we'd been using low-cost, colorful, 3/8" braided Polypropylene as our dinghy tow line. It has always floated satisfactorily, however when backing for another try at the small pier in the cove, Du NORD's



At the CPR Slip

big prop somehow snagged the line, bringing the Volvo-Penta MD-17C to an abrupt stop. The silence was deafening. We had shortened the tow line as we approached Little Lake Harbor on the north side of the island, but had neglected to bring our Dinghy, DUE SOUTH right up alongside after passing inside. The line we had in the water either sank, or our 16" screw churning with authority under a hit of reverse git-go pulled down an errant loop. Either way, the Du NORD wasn't going anywhere.

When cruising the Maine Coast in our Shearwater, the TRUE NORTH, we had fouled the prop of our 9.9-hp Yamaha-HT on lobster trap warps a number of times. The combination of our "Yammerhammer's" comparatively large, slow-turning 11" prop, the massive size of the stiff warps, and the motor's rubber bushing instead of a shear pin, all contributed to a not-very-serious situation. I would merely tilt up the motor, step into the motor well, and unwrap the warp. Occasionally I would have to get into our dinghy and go around astern for better access. We never had to cut a trap warp.

This was different; first, the line was a limber 3/8" braid. Second, there was no "rubber slip bushing" on our massive 16" prop. Lastly, the Volvo Penta had wound the tow line up real tight before it stalled. The only good thing about the situation was that I had recently added a swim platform and a good folding ladder to the stern of our Albin. They would prove indispensable. In the water, I could just barely reach the fouled prop

with my right hand, while hanging onto the starboard side of the swim platform with my left. A few times I dove under for a look with bare eyeballs. The sharpest small knife we had aboard, which wouldn't be missed if lost, was a parring knife from the galley. A 45-minute stint in the cold water, followed by a second 20-minute workout, was required by me to cut away the tow line. I had long planned to outfit our previous boat with a diving mask, but had procrastinated. Within a week of returning home I finally bought a mask, along with a pair of fins.

The town of Rosspport lies only a couple of miles north on the mainland. [see small red X on preceding map] The harbor was quiet; the only activity on the municipal pier was a 40-something Charter Sport Fisherman with SCUBA gear spread all over the vacinity. There was a Skipper of course, and a Mate, along with a party of four who told us they were planning a dive over the GUNHILDA the next day. They went on to explain that the GUNHILDA was a 195-ft luxury yacht belonging to an executive of Standard Oil which had struck a rock and sank not far away. Apparently the salvage effort cost more than the owner wanted to pay after the vessel slipped off the rock and plummeted to as depth of 298-ft. The GUNHILDA is a popular destination, though at that depth, she is not suitable for the average recreational diver.

Later that evening, back in the Albin following our meal in a "Mediterranean Style" restaurant called the Serendipity Gardens, a fellow strolled toward us and introduced himself, Ned, proprietor of the Rosspport Inn overlooking the west side of the harbor. When a light rain prompted a move, we invited Ned aboard for a glass of wine. A keen wit emerged, he asked if we knew Obama? (Illinois registration evident on the Du NORD) "No", then we asked "where is everyone? We saw only two other boats out on the water all day?" Ned said "there used to be more Americans, but not anymore, we don't let them bring their guns, eh?" As he departed, he told us he serves a fine cup of coffee up at the Inn, if we'd care to walk up in the morning.

Next morning, in the parlor of the Rosspport Inn, we saw framed photos of the GUNHILDA on the wall (before she sank), along with other depictions of area history. The Inn had originally been built by the CPR, whose active track runs along the shore right in front of the Inn. The coffee was indeed outstanding. As we motored slowly out of the harbor, we passed Ned's Cape Dory-27 riding on her mooring beneath the Inn, the flag

of Texas flying from her starboard shroud. What? Texas? Well, that's Ned, for'ya. We were very glad to have experienced the charms of Rosspport, though we still wondered why so few shared our view.

Intermittent rain fell on our 15-mile passage west through the length of Nipigon Bay toward Red Rock. Instead of being unpleasant, it gave our Albin a chance to show us how dry and comfortable she could be in such circumstances.





Red Rock, at the mouth of the Nipigon River, has a great marina, which we found filled to about 5% of capacity. Again, where were all the boats? We tied to a powerful runabout named "POLICE", hoping for a bit of extra security when we would leave the Du NORD for a walk or something. The Marina services building also serves as a Community Center and included a small Natural History Museum. The Café served a nice Walleye dinner that evening. It was there that Gayle and I decided to re name our Albin the Du NORD (French for "of the North") instead of NORD STJERNE (Norwegian for North Star) in recognition of the waters we most love cruising. The later name was proving too difficult for anyone to pronounce properly, the "st" usually more or less silent. Besides, Du NORD offered obvious alliteration with the name on our CLC Chesapeake Pram, DUE SOUTH, as had delightfully been the case with our Shearwater Yawl, TRUE NORTH.

Next morning it was just a short jaunt up the Nipigon River to the ramp at Nipigon. Along the way we searched closely under a high bluff on the east shore for some Ojibwa Pictographs our Cruising Guide tells about, but failed to spot them. With so many other cruisers having eschewed the array of charms to be encountered in these waters, the ramp was not crowded. Only one other boat was launched while we secured the Du NORD on her trailer. I poured the five gallons of Diesel fuel we had lashed to our bow rail into the truck for the trip home.

We found Superior Way, Third Edition, by Bonnie Dahl, to be very helpful and accurate, with just a couple of exceptions explained simply by the way things change in the communities described therein. I like the way the spiral binding permits any page to lie flat on our "nav table" by the helm.

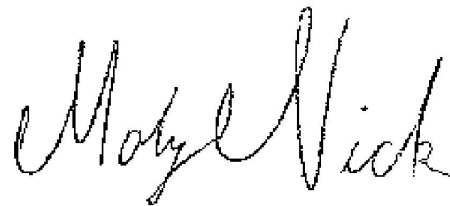
On the road south, our objective was Gooseberry Falls. However, their campground had been filled to capacity since early afternoon (no surprise). The Ranger kindly gave us a list of alternate campgrounds in the vicinity, including phone numbers. The first we called, located a bit north of Duluth, still had a couple of sites open and promised to save one for us.

On the subject of roads, and towing; we found the roads between N Illinois and Nipigon to be very good, the only bumpy link being a half-hour section up by Grand Marais, MN. The Albin's trailer performed well, the prior owner having bought it new just a couple of years before our purchase. At 5500-lbs the trailer GVW is some 1500-lbs greater than that for our 28-ft Shearwater Yawl, which we towed all across N America for 18 years. However, that still amounts to less than half what our 1993 Dodge 250 Diesel is rated for. The new trailer is both stronger and stiffer than our Shearwater trailer, so the net result is more worry-free towing. Our truck's 5.9L Cummins Diesel is equipped with a dual fuel system which runs on waste vegetable oil on trips such as this, greatly reducing travel expense.

Arriving at the campground, the Proprietor came out of his office to greet us with "is that an Albin-25?" I cruised all over Lake Superior in one of those! They can sure stand up to some rough water!" Good for a couple of Newbies to hear, eh? Turned out he had a magnificent 40-something Schooner out behind his office which was getting close to launch. A new pair of masts had just recently arrived.

Rolling home to Rockford, we enjoyed plenty of "warm fuzzies" concerning the vessel we had chosen to replace our beloved Shearwater Yawl, TRUE NORTH.

Faire winds,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mayel Nick". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the "Faire winds," text.