



# The Tahquamenon Scenic Byway

## Maritime Lore and History along Michigan's Shipwreck Coast

In a time before roads and rails, schooners braved this lonely stretch of Lake Superior coast guided by a string of beacons and life saving stations. Still, many ships were lost and today this sweep of lonely sand is named the Shipwreck Coast. It's the final resting place of over 200 shipwrecks, the most famous being the freighter Edmund Fitzgerald that went down with all its crew in 1975. Visitors can find the Fitz's bell and a museum dedicated to the region's rich maritime heritage at Whitefish Point, home to the oldest operating lighthouse on Lake Superior. Or get off the beaten path on an adventure to discover the solitude and serenity of the Crisp Point Lighthouse. Further to the east, Point Iroquois Lighthouse marks the entrance to the Saint Mary's river, connecting Lake Superior and Lake Huron, making it a great spot to observe Great Lakes freighters, or "lakers," and the larger ocean going "salties" as they make their way to and from the nearby locks of Sault Ste. Marie.

Whitefish Point and Whitefish Bay have been commonly used as a shipping lane for the materials mined throughout the Upper Peninsula, Wisconsin and Minnesota ore ranges since the mid to late 19th century. Whitefish Point is known as the 'Graveyard of Ships' because more vessels have been lost there than in any other part of the lake. The shipping lane near this area proves to be particularly dangerous due to the fact that once the point is rounded, northwest winds building up over 160 miles of open water create waves of gigantic proportions. These violent storms and wild waters erupt with a suddenness that often catches sailors unprepared. The waves on Superior strike harder and more often than any ocean wave and can come from two or three different directions, ricocheting off the shore and returning with even more intensity. Whitefish Point is the home of a former Coast Guard station and Whitefish Point Lighthouse, used for over 150 years, is the oldest active light on Lake Superior.





## Points of Interest

### Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum - [www.shipwreckmuseum.com](http://www.shipwreckmuseum.com)

A compound of historic maritime buildings located at Whitefish Point on the eastern end of Lake Superior's Shipwreck Coast. The museum's exhibits include the recovered bell of the legendary Edmund Fitzgerald, which went down with her crew of 29 in a November 1975 storm.

- The bed and breakfast lodging at the remodeled Coast Guard crew quarters alongside the Whitefish Point Light Tower and Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum offers historic immersion in several ways. Guests stay in rooms once staffed by life saving station crews who'd daily roam the beaches in search of ship wreck victims. Waves can be seen, and heard, from the cozy rooms, under a beacon still cast into the Lake Superior night.

### Great Lakes Shipwrecks - [www.shipwreckmuseum.com/great-lakes-shipwrecks-6/](http://www.shipwreckmuseum.com/great-lakes-shipwrecks-6/)

- **Edmund Fitzgerald** - On November 10, 1975 just 17 miles north-northwest of Whitefish Point, the Edmund Fitzgerald sank during an extreme November gale, in which the entire 29 man crew was lost to Lake Superior. The wreck itself is one of the most famous Great Lakes shipwrecks in history, and has been written, sung and discussed in great detail since 1975. In 1995 the Fitzgerald's 200 lb. bronze bell was recovered by the Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society at the request of the surviving family members of the ship's crew.
- **Steamer Vienna of Cleveland** - The Vienna of Cleveland was towing a schooner barge on the afternoon of September 16, 1892 and, as it was making its way for the Soo Locks filled with iron ore, it was struck by another vessel. This collision was enough to fatally puncture the hull of the Vienna. While no lives were lost, the Vienna and all of its cargo sank in Whitefish Bay to a depth of 146 feet until it was rediscovered in 1975 by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service while setting fish sampling nets.
- **Comet** - The Comet was completed in 1857 and measured an astonishing 181 feet long and weighed 621 tons. On August 26, 1875 it was rammed by a Canadian sidewheeler, named the Manitoba, in Whitefish Bay. The Comet sank and claimed the lives of 11 men. The wreck was discovered in the 1970s by a dive team from Milwaukee and is one of the area's most interesting wrecks to explore, but is also dangerously deep at 230 feet.
- **Samuel Mather** - This wreck is one of the most intact examples known of the late 19th century. Its hull, masts and cabins are still intact and only a small one-foot wide by six-foot tall hole in her side where the Brazil crashed into her bow. The vessel was powered by both sail and steam, and was 246 feet in length and weighed over 1,500 tons. It is sitting in 180 feet of water and is one of the favorite wreck sites to dive of those who study the sites in this area.
- **John M. Osborn** - Over 170 feet deep, the Osborn sank on July 27, 1884 while towing two schooner-barges loaded with iron ore from Marquette. Dense fog led to the collision between the Osborn and the Alberta, a Canadian steamer, and in all, four men lost their lives. The Osborn is a classic example of a wooden screw steam-barge in excellent condition. It was originally built in 1882 as a single-deck lumber hooker, 178 feet in length, 32-foot beam and 14-foot depth.



- **John B. Cowle** - The Cowle sank in 1909 but is one of the most popular of wrecks near Whitefish Point, being a challenge for tech divers at 215 feet, yet remarkably well-preserved.
- **Cyprus** - One of the deeper shipwreck sites in the area, the Cyprus is over 460 feet below the surface of Lake Superior. It was only 21 days old when it sank while filled with iron ore and headed for Buffalo, NY. The cause of the wreck is a mystery but it is believed the hull plating was compromised and that water was mixing with the ore and weighing the ship down. The Cyprus sank on October 11, 1907 and only had one survivor. A man named Charles Pitz was the only crew member to board and stay aboard the ship's emergency life raft during a fierce gale.

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Phone: (906) 635-1742

Website: <http://www.shipwreckmuseum.com/>

### **Crisp Point Lighthouse**

Take the road less traveled and discover an amazing part of Michigan's Maritime history; Crisp Point Lighthouse, one of the most remote Great Lakes Lighthouses. GPS won't get you there. Follow the signs along the heavily forested road to bring you to the coast. The lighthouse is all that remains from the original complex built in 1875. Miles away from signs of modern civilization, the lighthouse receives close to 25,000 visitors a year. Come enjoy the isolation of Crisp Point. Here you will experience Superior's beautiful winding shoreline, forests home to all forms of wildlife and a fantastic freighter viewing site. The trip will definitely be worth your time.

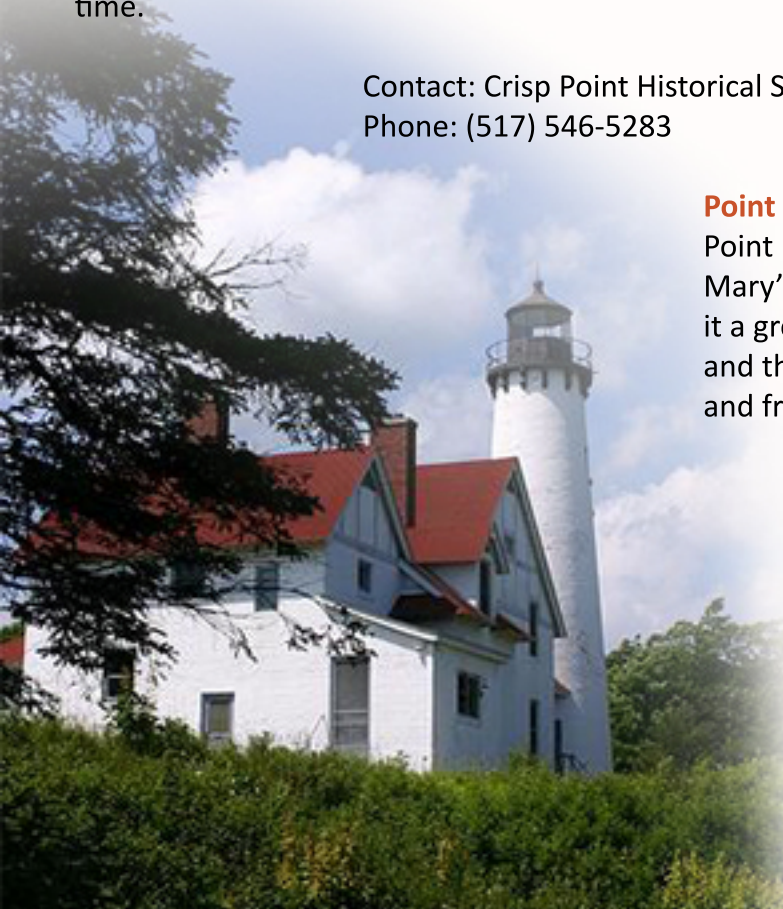
Contact: Crisp Point Historical Society

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### **Point Iroquois Lighthouse**

Point Iroquois Lighthouse marks the entrance to the Saint Mary's river, connecting Lake Superior and Lake Huron, making it a great spot to observe Great Lakes freighters, or "lakers," and the larger ocean going "salties" as they make their way to and from the nearby lock of Sault Ste. Marie.

- Point Iroquois was named for the Iroquois warriors massacred there by the Ojibway in 1662. The native Algonkian name for the Point is Nadouenigoning, composed of the words "Nadone" (Iroquois) and "Akron" (bone).
- In 1975, the Point Iroquois Lighthouse was placed on the National Register of Historic Lighthouses. It is managed by the National Forest Service.





## Maritime Fast Facts

- Over 100 ships have sunk off the coast of Whitefish Point.
- Over 300 vessels have sunk along the famous “Shipwreck Coast” that spans from Whitefish Point to Marquette, MI.
- The sinking of the Edmund Fitzgerald took place right off the tip of Whitefish Point during a November journey in which all 29 of its sailors were lost to the lake.
- The famous “Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald” sung by Gordon Lightfoot has made the 1975 sinking one of the most infamous Great Lakes shipping tragedies in history.
- Shipwreck debris can still be found along the Lake Superior shoreline around treacherous Whitefish Point.

