

## Where History Meets Wine

By Bruce Kemp, bruce@brucekempphotography.net

There's a pleasant ghostly quality to the west end of Lake Erie. So much happened here—and is still happening—that it's tough to decide what to see and do. It's safe to say Erie's north shore is one of the country's most exciting cruising grounds for its accommodating small towns, wineries, fishing, and overall sense of history.

Cruising here lets you visit a combination of urban and rural harbors. The largest cities are Detroit and Windsor, but there's a lot of fun waiting in the smaller towns like Leamington, Kingsville, and Colchester. Two attractions should inspire trailer boaters to visit the area at the west end of Lake Erie—that's the fishing and the wine. If you like to eat and drink well, then this is the place.

Lake Erie offers some of the best freshwater fish in the world. Pickerel, jumbo yellow perch, large and smallmouth bass, and rainbow trout inhabit the lake. Fishing Lake Erie requires gear to get Erie Dearies or medium-sized spoons down deep to where lunker pickerel hang. Downriggers are pretty standard, but Pink Ladies and Dipsy Divers also work well.

Once you've got your fish, it's time for local wine. Sixteen vineyards operate in the

Lake Erie North Shore Wine District. There are plenty of superb white wines to drink with your lake fish like Colio's Bricklayer's Reward, Big Pond Sauvignon Blanc, or Cooper's Hawk Pinot Grigio.

The region's red wines speak for themselves. Vineyards grow everything from Cabernet sauvignon to Baco noir. One of the authentic, beefy wines produced here that doesn't get much press is Cabernet franc. Sit down with a tomahawk steak and a bottle of this, and you will be in seventh heaven.

Get off the boat in any of these small ports and take a wine tour. To stretch your legs, you can rent a bike or join a day-long bicycle tour with Wine Dog Cycling Tours out of Harrow (east of Kingsville). If cycling isn't precisely your tipple, Canada South Wine Tours will pick you up at either Cedar Island Marina in Kingsville, Leamington Municipal Marina, or Colchester Harbour.

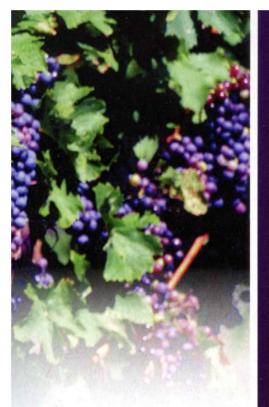
As the beer commercial says, Pelee Island has a shady past. With Prohibition in America, it became an essential rumrunning depot during the 1920s. Al Capone smuggled thousands of barrels of spirits from the Island into Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan from here.

Docking on Pelee is limited, so book ahead. Take your bicycles with you, as you can cycle the entire island in one morning.

The only place to tie up on Pelee Island Winery Pavilion is Scudder Harbor; the marina has fifty transient slips. The maximum size of vessel they can accommodate is 70 feet, and the minimum depth at the docks is between 6.5 and 7 feet. 30- and 50-amp electrical services are offered at the ports, but no WiFi. Gasoline is available, but not diesel or propane. Water at the docks is not potable, but drinking water is available at the gas dock. There is a pump-out, ice, and showers at the gas dock and office.

From the harbor, it's a ten-minute car ride, or half-hour by bicycle, to the Pelee Island Wine Pavilion. Along with their wines, they have an excellent deli with barbecue supplies, and boaters can use the barbecues set up at the edges of the vineyard to cook steaks and burgers.

Scudder Harbour is a short hike from the abandoned stone lighthouse at the tip of Lighthouse Point. This lighthouse guided shipping through Pelee Passage (the shipping lane between Point Pelee and the island's north side), which often proved dangerous to mariners in the spring



CHARTS

Western Lake Erie, Cdn. Hydrographic Chart #2123 Pelee Island and North Shore Lake Erie, Cdn. Hydrographic Chart #2181 Detroit River, NOAA Chart #14848

DRIVING

The main access route is via Highway 401.
To get to Leamington, Kingsville, Colchester, and Pelee Island, take the highway west from Toronto. When nearing Chatham, watch for the signs indicating the turnoff for Leamington. Take Country Rd. 77 south to Leamington. Kingsville and Colchester are a short drive to the east along the lakeshore. From there, you can continue right into Amherstburg without returning to the 401.

If you want to go straight into Windsor, stay on the 401, and it will take you to within a few blocks of the Detroit River.

Ferries run from Kingsville and Leamington to West Dock daily (weather permitting). Reservations are required. To book a spot on the 90-minute crossing, go to

Wreck of the America, Pelee Island: 41° 49'675" N 082° 38'066" W

Discover Boating Marina Directory: www.discoverboating.ca/boating/marinas.aspx

www.ontarioferries.com or call 1-800-661-2220.

Scudder Harbour, Pelee Island's main recreational boating facility: (519) 724-2377, 41° 48' 49" N 082° 39' 36" W

ErieQuest, SCUBA diving information: www.eriequest.ca

Pelee Island Wines: www.peleeisland.com

Essex County Wineries and Breweries: www.ecwb.ca (A complete listing of the wineries and craft breweries in the Erie North Shore Wine Region)

Canada Wine Tours: www.canadasouthwinetours.com

Farm Dog Cycles: www.farmdogcycles.com

Walkerville Walking Tour: www.citywindsor.ca/residents/historyofwindsor/Documents/Walkerville

African Heritage: www.windsor-communities.com/african-sites-churches.php

Buxton National Historic Site: www.buxtonmuseum.com

and the fall. It's also a great place to take the kids for a picnic and day on the beach.

You can also visit the ruins of one of Canada's first wineries. In the 1860s, Canadian farmers saw the infant wine industry springing up on the American islands and decided to get into the game. Capt. D. McCormick and T. Smith bought 25 acres of land and launched Canada's first commercial winery, Vin Villa, in 1868. The ruins of the winery still haunt a leafy glade in the island's center.

Winemaking thrived until Prohibition curtailed the over-the-counter demands for fermented grape juice. The business declined until winemakers at the modern Pelee Island Wines recognized the superb terroir (wine-growing qualities of the soil) and began planting vineyards. Today they have 200 acres under cultivation on the island producing fine wines from European vines.

Pelee is the southernmost inhabited bit of Canadian land. More than half of the fifty American states lie north of the island, but passports and vaccine certificates are mandatory for entry into Canada. Because of its location,

the island is an ecological treasure house featuring thousands of Carolinian plants like the Honey Locust and Sassafras trees. It's also a naturalist paradise with diverse birdlife not found anywhere else in the country and rare reptiles like the Blue Racer snake.

The island's shores have seen their fair share of shipwrecks due to lying astride the main shipping routes. One of the closest and most accessible to explore by snorkeling is the steamer, SS America, which ran aground in 1856. The wreck lies off the beach about half a mile southeast of Lighthouse Point. The ship's boiler is just below the surface (less than 18-inches), while the bulk of the wreckage sits in about ten feet of water.

Further out, in Pelee Passage, there are more than 260 wrecks. So far, 60 of these have been located and explored. These wrecks are relatively shallow at an average depth of 40 feet, and ErieQuest, Leamington's effort to preserve the region's

marine heritage, has established mooring buoys on fifteen of them.

The Detroit River corridor, which extends from Pelee right up to Sarnia on the St. Clair River, was probably a more prominent smuggling region throughout the 1920s than today's Mexican border.

Not only was Capone a frequent visitor from Chicago to the Hiram Walker Distillery, but a lot of homegrown talent sprung up on both sides of the river to take advantage of the opportunities offered by Prohibition. Nearly forgotten groups such as the Purple Gang and Little Jewish Navy made fortunes running illegal liquor into the United States.

Booze wasn't illegal in Canada; Prohibition was an American institution. What Prohibition did do on both sides of the border was pump money and development into the boating business. The rumrunners needed fast, low boats that could carry contraband cargo and outrun American revenue agents.

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America was always fascinated with fast boats. Gar Wood developed his incredible racing machines in the Motor City and further up on Lake St. Clair, local boat builders gave liquor outlaws a distinct speed advantage. Names like Hacker-Craft and Chris Craft caught the buying public's imagination, and after World War II, pleasure boat sales skyrocketed into the stratosphere.

Canadian Club Brand Centre (Hiram Walker) tours in Windsor are worth the price of admission. From April through

December, you can visit the tasting rooms to sample the renowned Canadian whisky and learn about the era that made "Scarface" Al Capone and Elliot Ness household names.

The region was also a prominent Underground Railroad gateway into Canada. If you want to understand what the area meant to the fugitive slaves escaping to freedom, rent a car and do a tour of the African-Canadian Heritage Trail to the John Freeman Walls Historic Site, Buxton, and the Sandwich Street First Baptist Church. When the water in the Detroit River is low

enough, the foundations of the Mama Judah Light are still visible. Lake captains involved in the Underground Railroad dropped escaped enslaved people off here (out of musket range) to await pick-up by Canadian conductors who would row out the refugees to safety on the Windsor shore. \$\psi\$

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