

Ken Olsen  
Photographs by W. Garth Dowling

# Ahoy



**Set sail for  
adventure on the  
Great Lake Huron.**



## *Snap!*

The sailboat Griffin was flying across Lake Huron in stiff winds when Sea Scouts Courtney Palm and Peter Schmidt heard the halyard line break. Moments later, the jib crumpled.

Time for these Scouts to spring into action.

Peter and the rest of the group ran to the front of the boat and jumped on the fallen sail to keep it from going into the water, all while waves were breaking over the bow and spraying everyone on the foredeck.

The Scouts shouted at the helmsman to turn the boat into the wind so they could fix the sail. They untangled the spare line, tied it to the jib and re-hoisted the sail as the boat rocked in 6-foot swells.

A terrifying experience? A nerve-racking ordeal? Hardly.

"It was crazy fun," says Courtney, a member of Ship 5496, St. Louis, Mo.

Especially since everything turned out OK.

"It's team building to the extreme," says Peter, a Sea Scout in Ship 123, Chatham, Ill. "It takes your mind off of being seasick."

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## Get Ready

Welcome to the Lake Huron High Adventure Cruise, an event in which these Sea Scouts, Venturers and Boy Scouts sailed nine vessels for five days and 281 miles across Lake Huron from Mackinaw City, Mich., to Port Huron, Mich., to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the BSA's Sea Scout program.

Like all outdoors adventures, this one required plenty of preparation. The Scouts planned simple meals that were easily prepared in the small kitchen in the hold of the boats. Breakfasts were bagels, oatmeal and granola bars. Lunches were sandwiches or wraps. Dinners were "things you can cook in one pot, like stew," Peter says.

The Scouts practiced knot tying — particularly the bowline. And knowing there would be little extra space on the boats, they pared down their clothing to the essentials.

They were sure to include rain gear to stay dry in rough weather, along with hats, sunglasses and sunblock. They made sure everyone brushed up on their swimming skills, and of course, they all wore life jackets every second they were on the water.

## Underway

One month before the trip, some of the Sea Scouts went to the Greater St. Louis Council's S bar F Scout Ranch to practice sailing. Then everyone gathered in Mackinaw City in late July to set sail.

Each morning, the Scouts would stow their gear and check the weather to see what sails they would need for the day. Then they'd plan their course and head out onto the lake.

Once they were under sail, the Scouts took turns steering the boat, navigating, trimming the sails and watching for other boats.

The Scouts also worked on rank advancement, including plotting key points on a navigation chart, reading headings on the GPS and radioing other ships.

"Staying on a GPS course is probably the hardest thing because of the wind and waves and shallow water," says Sea Scout Alex Binder of Ship 1492, Ida, Mich.

*Sea Scout Nathan Smiley is up at the break of dawn swabbing the deck while the ship is anchored on Lake Huron.*



*It's not just sailing; it's working: Venturer Burke Culkeen does his part to deploy a special type of sail called the "spinnaker."*



*Sea Scouts Alex Binder, Robert Conner and Nathan Smiley (left to right) fight through a splash from the lake to prepare the lines.*



***"Sailing was a collaborative experience. You have to be flexible."*** - Venturer Erin Dunne

*Sea Scout Lucas Shapland keeps his eyes peeled as he steers the vessel through shipping traffic near Port Huron, Mich.*



## The Sea Scout Promise

As a Sea Scout I promise to do my best:

- To guard against water accidents;
- To know the location and proper use of the lifesaving devices on every boat I board;
- To be prepared to render aid to those in need;
- To seek to preserve the motto of the sea: women and children first.



**"It's definitely a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Some days it's crazy. Some days you are relaxing in the sun, having a nice day sailing. It's just awesome."**

*- Sea Scout Courtney Palm*

It also was difficult to get used to judging distances. "It was surprising how they would say, 'We are only going to that lighthouse two nautical miles away,'" Alex says. "And then it takes forever."

## At Home on the Lake

After checking the weather one morning and finding a very foul forecast, the Scouts discussed whether they should even leave port. Eventually, they worked out a plan that everyone was comfortable with.

Not long after, the waves got rough. Scouts who had taken motion-sickness medication generally fared OK. Others ... not so much. Some fought through their motion sickness on deck. Some went below and tried to sleep it off.

At night, some of the Scouts slept on the sails that were folded up on the deck of the ship, the gentle rocking of the boats lulling them to sleep.

On the last day, the Sea Scouts jumped in the water and then hoisted each other back into the boat as part of practice for rescuing someone who has fallen overboard. They also practiced setting the anchor and using different sails.

Now many of these Sea Scouts are already planning their next sailing adventure.

"It was a lot of fun," says Alex, "and it was a good learning experience for our ship." ♣



*All work and no play makes for some dull Sea Scouts. That's why there's break time, during which Robert Conner (in photo at left) peeks out from the cabin. Later, an entire crew goes for a swim.*



View more photos from this trip and find a Sea Scout ship near you at [boyslife.org/links/seascout](http://boyslife.org/links/seascout)

## Sailing with the Sea Scouts

If piloting a boat, trimming sails, swimming and yacht racing sound like fun, consider the Sea Scouts. The program offers Scouts the opportunity to learn the ins and outs of seamanship, from compass work to engine maintenance and rope work to semaphore. Many Sea Scouts also scuba dive and go on a long cruise – such as sailing one of the Great Lakes.

Sea Scouting was started in England in 1910 and brought to the United States in 1912. Part of the Venturing program, it is open to young men and women ages 14 to 21. Ranks include Apprentice, Ordinary, Able and Quartermaster. Quartermaster is equivalent to the rank of Eagle Scout.

Sea Scouts wear a U.S. Navy-style blue or white uniform for formal occasions. The work uniform includes a blue button-up shirt, dark blue pants and a baseball-style cap.



*Venturer Erin Dunne flies the spinnaker sail aboard the War Chant.*



*Lucas Shapland and Katie Bruton plot their course as part of a report for the captain of the ship.*



*Peter Schmidt, Courtney Palm and Katie Bruton (left to right) gather the sail as their vessel prepares to change direction.*



*A navigation exercise requires Lucas Shapland (front) to shout out course corrections to Courtney Palm (back) as Peter Schmidt checks things out in the middle.*

