*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Lakeshore trip reminds of Wisconsin’s natural beauty**

Do teachers still require students coming back to school to write about what they did on their summer vacation?

It’s been decades since I’ve had to complete that assignment, but having recently returned from a couple of days off to visit the Lake Superior shore and the Bayfield area, it’s an experience still on my mind. So with due apologies to my childhood teachers, here’s my homework assignment.

One of the best things about living in Wisconsin is traveling around our beautiful state and experiencing places and activities that are not far from home. Owning a business is not conducive to taking long vacations, but my wife Sherry I squeezed in a quick three days.

Part of the journey is traveling, which doesn’t have to be the fastest route. Four-lane highways are good for getting quickly from point A to point B, but don’t offer the most scenic routes. For our trip north, I selected Highway 13, which runs straight north from Marshfield.

Technically we did not venture through Wisconsin’s Northwoods — which by strict definition are the counties of Forest, Langlade, Lincoln, Oneida and Vilas. But somewhere in Taylor County and certainly in Price County, the landscape that was dominated by farms as we drove through Jackson, Clark and Wood counties became predominantly forest.

The first day’s highlight was Copper Falls State Park just outside Mellen, where scenic waterfalls flow through deep gorges along ancient lava flows. A 1.7-mile walk took us along both sides of the Bad River for spectacular vistas overlooking the falls. It’s a landscape similar to the mountain canyons of the west.

Day two’s highlight was a 58-mile boat trip that took us past two lighthouses on the Apostle Islands and a close-up view of the sea caves along the north shore. Our last lake boat tour was 15 years ago when we went to Mackinac Island. This tour was informative and provided scenery that you won’t get from the shore.

A Bayfield County road map gave us an opportunity to explore some of the backroads. There are a few farms carved out of the woods and many had just finished their second cutting of hay. There also are orchards and fruit farms that grow cherries, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and peaches, thanks to a microclimate off the lake.

We also found some secluded beaches. There’s no point in making a trip to one of the Great Lakes if you don’t take time to enjoy the water. I only wish our lodging had offered a better view of the water, as I could spend hours sitting along the lake listening to the soothing sounds of the waves rolling onto the shore.

Living on the water isn’t always romantic. Just ask some of the folks who live along Pigeon Lake near Drummond. The lake was swamped on Father’s Day weekend in 2018 with as much as 15 inches of rain. The lake levels have remained high since, causing some homes and cabins to be abandoned. We got a first-hand look as we drove along Highway N, which has been raised several times to stay above the water levels.

Our return trip also gave us the chance to visit a few of the state’s wineries. It’s nice to be on the other side of the counter for a change and to sample other winemaker’s inspirations.

We left on a Monday and returned on a Wednesday. Lots of driving for three short days, but we’ve now seen and experienced another part of Wisconsin. There’s plenty more awaiting discovery.

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***Photo cutlines (all Chris Hardie photos)***

*Caves 1.jpg: A view of some of the sea caves along the north shore of Lake Superior.*

*Caves 2.jpg: The caves are created by the water carving out the sandstone.*

*Caves 3.jpg: The sea caves are a popular destination for kayakers.*

*Bad River.jpg: The Bad River flows through gorges in Copper Falls State Park near Mellen.*

*Ferry.jpg: A ferry hauling vehicles and people makes a return trip from Madeline Island to Bayfield.*

*Pigeon Lake.jpg: High water levels on Pigeon Lake near Drummond have left some house uninhabitable.*

*Sand Island.jpg: The lighthouse on Sand Island, one of the Apostle Islands on Wisconsin’s north shore.*

*Tyler Forks.jpg: Chris and Sherry Hardie with the Tyler Forks Cascades in the background.*