

Traveling the Great Loop by Catamaran

The One Eye Dog

Aquila 44 Power Catamaran

American's Great Loop

- We are always asked if we can do the Loop in a catamaran. The answer, of course, is YES! There is a huge misconception that the Loop can only be completed on small trawler type vessels. Completing the Loop on a wide beamed catamaran will require a few additional decisions. If the Trent Severn Waterway is critical to your Loop experience, a wide beamed catamaran might not be the best choice. If you are after comfort, ease of travel, great fuel economy and a wonderful vessel – you're going to love Looping Cat Style!



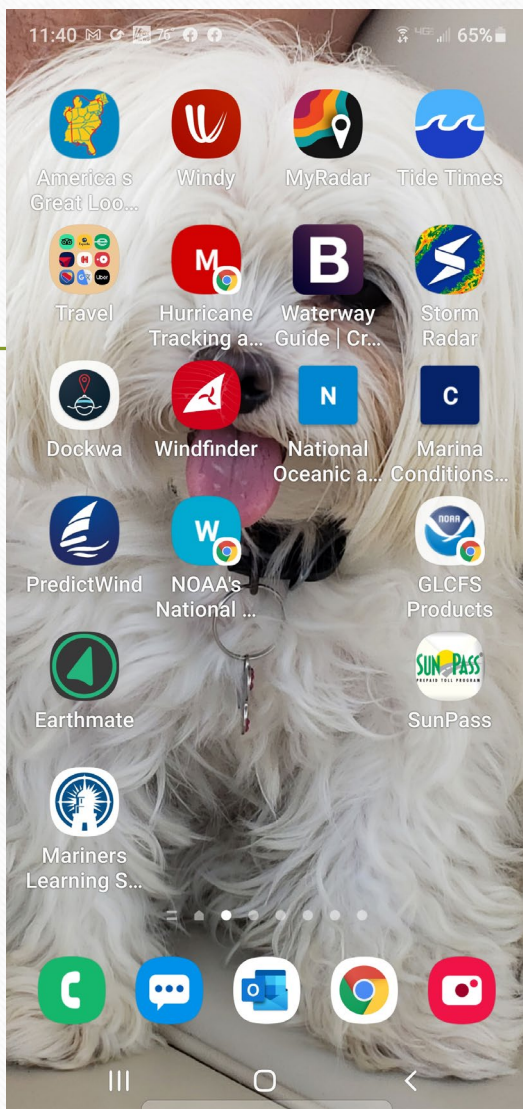


The Route

- East Coast – the Atlantic Intercoastal Waterway to the Hudson River
- Erie Canal – MAXIMUM 20' air draft – be prepared!
- Lake Ontario to Port Dalhousie through the Welland Canal to Port Colborne or Lake Ontario to Trenton – Trent Severn Waterway (MAXIMUM beam 23')
- Great Lakes to the Calumet Sag (Illinois Waterway) – MAXIMUM air draft 19.7'
- Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway to Mobile
- The Gulf Crossing to Florida

Wind, Weather, Tides and Conditions – the APPS for your tablet or phone

- Favorite weather apps – Windy, Windfinder, Predict Wind, My Radar and Storm Chaser, etc. We use ALL of them every day!
- Tide Times - vital for Georgia, South and North Carolina, Virginia and Mobile Bay
- Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory (GLCFS) – CRITICAL to read the wave patterns on the Great Lakes – do not leave the dock prior to “animating” this program for each lake traveled -
<https://www.glerl.noaa.gov/res/glcfs/glcfs.php?lake=e&ext=vv&type=F&hr=105>
- A few extras are Dockwa, Waterways Guide, Hurricane Tracker
- Highly recommended for the Gulf Crossing is Chris Parker’s Marine Weather. He offers an AGLCA discount. We won’t cross the Gulf again without confirming with Chris.



America's Great Loo...



Windy



MyRadar



Tide Times



Travel



Hurricane Tracking a...



Waterway Guide | Cr...



Storm Radar



Dockwa



Windfinder



National Oceanic a...



Marina Conditions...



PredictWind



NOAA's National ...



GLCFS Products



Earthmate



SunPass



Mariners Learning S...





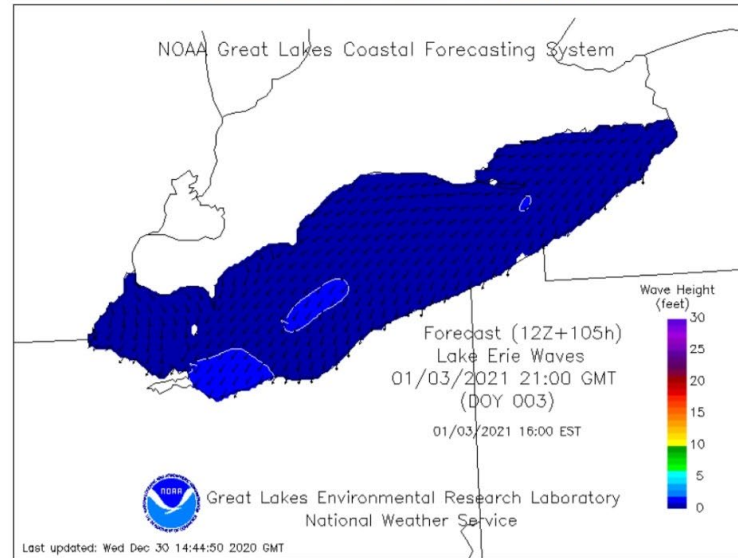
GLCFS Products

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Lake Erie Waves (Forecast)

Animation +01 +02 +03 +04 +05 +06 +07 +08 +09 +10 +11 +12 +15 +18 +21 +24 +27 +30 +33 +36 +39 +42 +45 +48
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[View animated gif](#) (right click to download), [Step Earlier](#) | [Later](#)



Tennessee-Tombigbee Website

- On the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway – you will need to learn to read the dam gauge for the various locks. I use this site for each of the locks and dams:
<https://water.weather.gov/ahps2/hydrograph.php?gage=dlda1&wfo=bmx>
- This allows you to follow the flood stage of the water levels of the Tenn-Tom which will affect travel. This is critical during the fall Southern migration due to rains and the dams releasing water preparing for winter runoff. For example, October 2019, we could not access the Okatuppa anchorage due to high water. This past summer we anchored there with the water level down more than 10 feet.



National Weather Service Advanced Hydrologic Prediction Service

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Local weather forecast by "City, ST"

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Provide
Feedback
Ask Questions



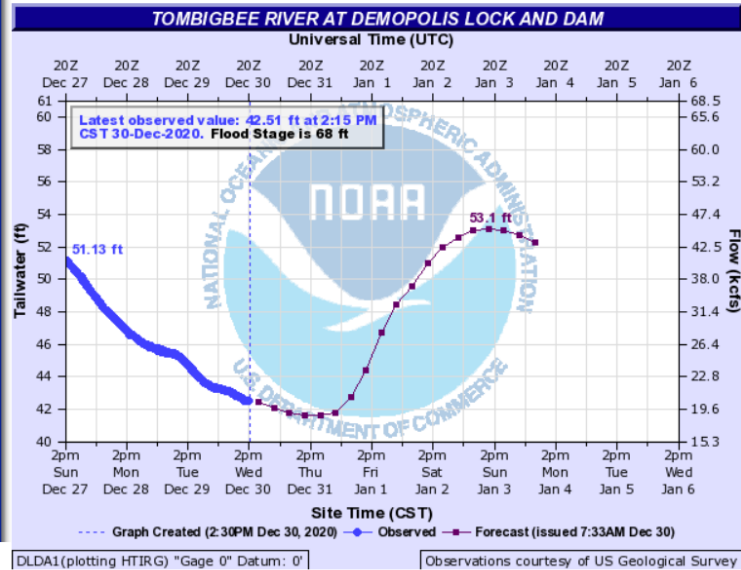
National Observations WFO Observations Hydrograph

Weather Forecast Office Birmingham, AL

Southeast River Forecast Center

Hydrograph River at a Glance Download Probability Information

Auto Refresh: OFF



Printable Image
About this graph
Tabular Data (UTC)
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NOTE: River forecasts for this location take into account past precipitation and the precipitation amounts expected approximately 48 hours into the future from the forecast issuance time.

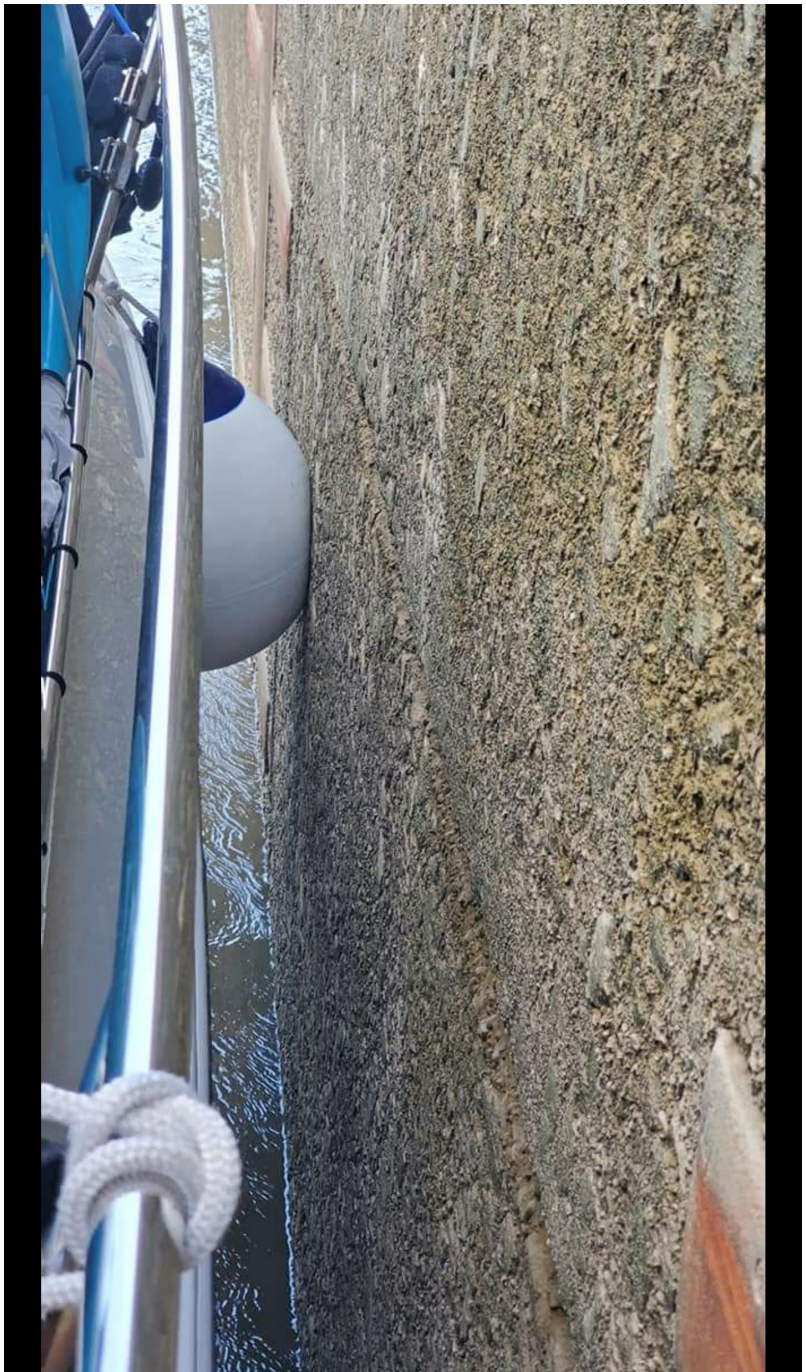
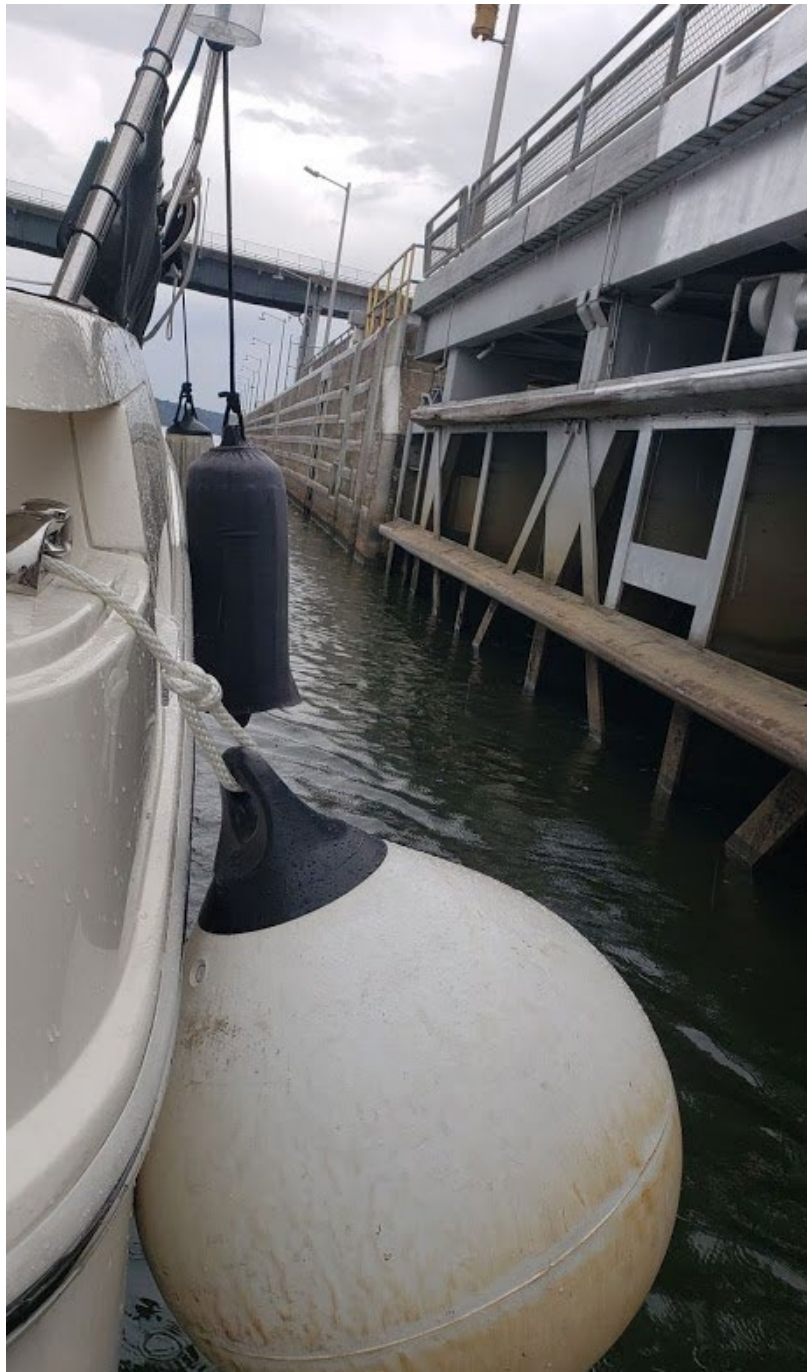
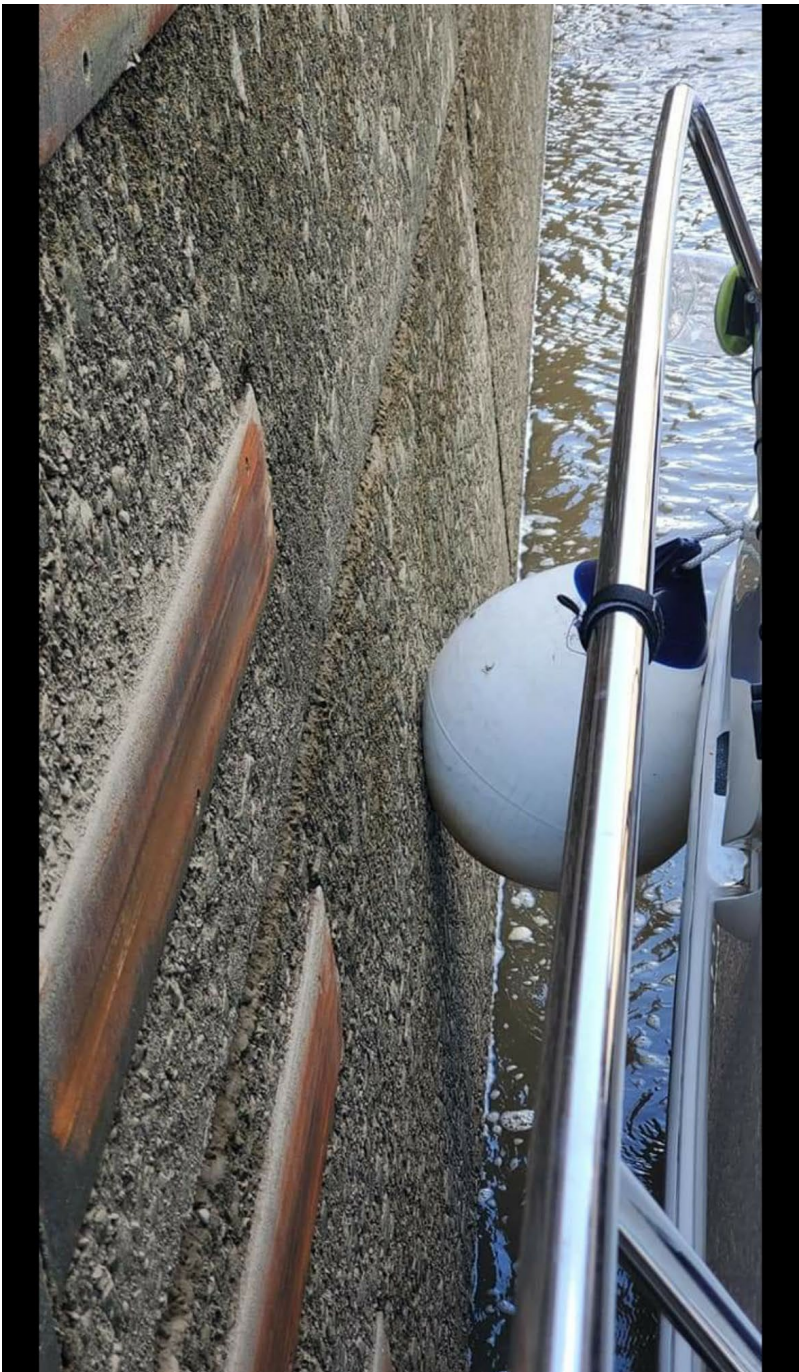
NOTE: Forecasts for the Tombigbee River at Demopolis Lock and Dam are issued routinely year-round.

Default Hydrograph

[Return to Area Map](#)

Equipment for Locking and Docking

- Fenders, fenders and more fenders!! You can't have enough!
- We use 21" round fenders (four) and 18" long fenders (six)
- We use 4" round by 5' long PVC pipe drilled and threaded with 9' line on each end as Fender Boards (you can use 4' long as well). You can also make fender boards from wood boards.
- We have a 20' to 25' dedicated line for use in locks. I recommend a color different from your regular lines so you can easily find it.
- Heavy duty boat hooks – one for each side of the vessel for easy access



Equipment for Locking and Docking (Continued)

- Sailing gloves with $\frac{3}{4}$ length fingers for line handling in the locks and a good jack knife always kept with the line handler while locking
- Either a Docking Master (docking system on the One Eye Dog) or headsets (aka marriage savers). Do NOT use cell phone Bluetooth due to lack of cell coverage in many locations.
- Personal Floatation Devices (PDF) – MANDATORY while in all locks
- Always be prepared to raft when necessary.



Fender Placement for Locking

- On our Aquila 44, we place a small fender at the widest point of the corner of the bow. We secure TWO 21” round balls to the forward cleat, leave the mid-ship cleat open for the line handler and attach a 21” ball to the aft cleat. We also have an 18” long fender that rides at the water line to protect the swim deck. Do NOT attach fenders to the railing unless its absolutely necessary as the fenders will drag on the lock walls and can destroy your railing. Always place all fenders at your vessel’s rub rail. Through trial and error, this has proven to be the best fender locations on the Aquila 44 and we have transited 222 locks to date!
- On the Trent Severn and Erie, depending on your vessel’s freeboard, you may need to lower or raise fenders at the top of the locks. Be prepared to add either additional fenders or know how to quickly make adjustments as needed. Remember, the line handler should not leave their post to adjust fenders. We had our most serious boating situation happen in a lock when a line wrapped around itself and starting pulling our boat out of the water!



Fender Boards

- Fender Boards are terrific when you don't have a floating dock. Pilings make for difficult docking situations and fender boards make it so easy!
- You will hang two 18" fenders vertically from your railing and then tie the fender board to the railing allowing it to hang horizontally over the fenders. This will allow the boat to rest against the piling or wall without causing damage to the boat.
- The negative is that you will be a little farther from the dock than without fender boards, but we'd rather be farther away than pay for gel coat repairs!

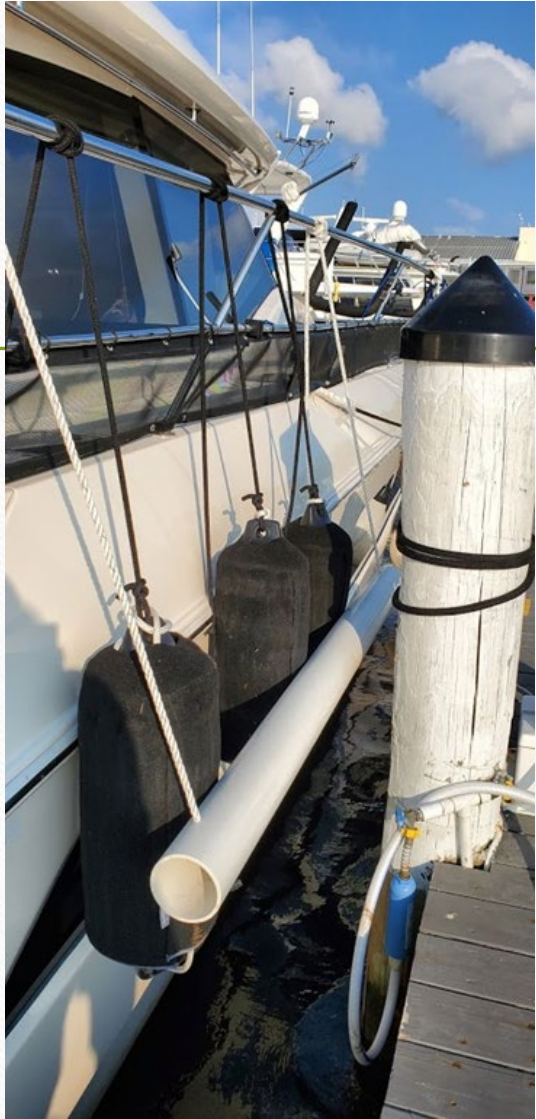
The Locks

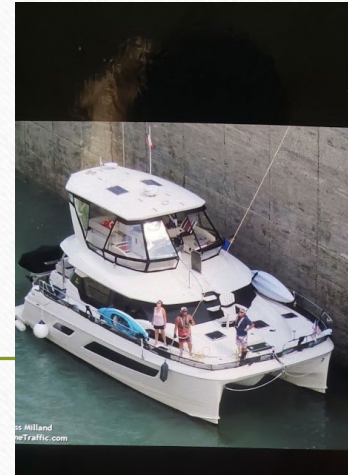
- Great Bridge Lock on the AICW – do NOT use fenders. This lock has wonderful rubber bumpers installed.
- Erie Canal – the Erie has different lock systems (Eastern, Western, Oswego, etc.). Number of locks transited will be based on your vessels air draft. The Erie uses lines that hang down from the walls. They are slimy and gross! You will generally want to use a mid-ship cleat for working with the line. DO NOT lock down the line – EVER! You will make a “S” (half figure 8) wrapping the line to your cleat and then holding it throughout the lockage. On a down lock, you will need to constantly release the line and on an up lock you will need to pull in the line. Always be vigilant with the lines and don’t get distracted. You can also have two handlers, one each at bow and stern; if your vessel can fit grabbing two separate lines.
- The Trent Severn Waterway – the TSW has 44 locks including the Peterborough and Kirkland Lift Locks and the Big Chute Railway. The final Lock is 23’ x 84’ – maximum beam is 22.5’ feet to allow fenders. The locks generally use cables on the lock walls. You will feed your line through the cable allowing the line will slide up or down based on the lockage. Your engines are turned off during the lockage. Other vessels will be very, very close, sometimes only a fender width on the beam with the bows of other boats over your swim platforms and jet skis/wave runners crammed in where possible.



The Locks (continued)

- The Welland Canal – The Welland is a commercial canal that allows pleasure craft to transit. There are only 8 locks that you transit straight through without stopping. They currently have a schedule for pleasure craft to lock through (generally a Loop boat will be on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday). If you are transiting UP lockage (Lake Ontario to Lake Erie), you must have a minimum of THREE adults on board. There are people you can hire to lock through if you only have two. You must buy a lock permit prior to transiting and make sure you print a copy of it to turn in at the last lock. All commercial traffic must finish the system before pleasure craft can enter the locks. You are required to arrive prior to 9:00 a.m. the day you are locking through. Once given permission enter the first lock, you will go straight through all eight locks without stopping. It took us a record time of 8.5 hours, but some boats we know have waited over 30 hours before starting.

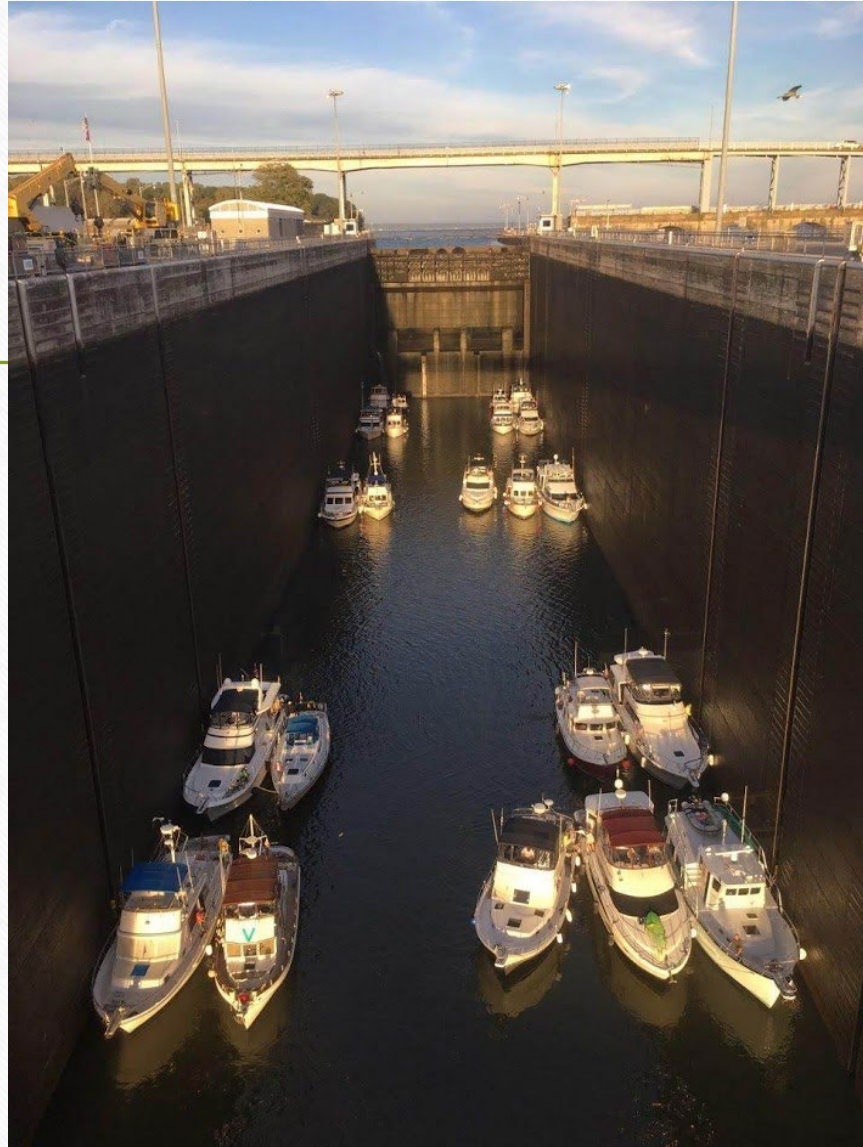




The Locks (Continued)

- Inland Waterways – the best and the biggest!
- The Inland Locks having floating bollards. A bollard is a large metal pin that floats up or down with the water level. This is where that extra special colored line comes in. You will attach the eye loop to your center cleat, holding the bitter end tossing the center around the bollard than figure “S” the line back to your center cleat. This is where you channel your inner Cowboy/girl! ALWAYS hold the line while locking. Do NOT allow anything else to be on that cleat – only the line you are using for the bollard. You will just float up or down along with the water level. Always ensure your fenders are correctly positioned. The first and last bollards provide the smoothest ride for pleasure craft. Be prepared to raft to another vessel if all the bollards are in use. Larger boats always take the bollard with smaller boats rafting.





The Locks and Lockmasters

- Always verify the status of the lock prior to approaching. In our experience, the lockmasters tend to work better with women crew members! LOL
- I always call the lock the day before to ensure the lock is running. Then I call again the morning before we leave the dock (different lock crews have different info). I explain that I'm a "PC" (pleasure craft) and which direction I plan to lock (up or down). I ask if there are any concerns regarding the lock such as work schedules, tow schedules, missing pins, preference on typing to port or starboard side, etc. I always ask what time they would like us to arrive for a lock through. This puts them in control and I'm not being pushy.
- If you have several vessels running together, chose a leader! Only ONE boat contacts the lock and acts as organizer. NEVER have numerous boats calling the locks as it wastes their time, usually making them cranky and a cranky lockmaster will extend your wait time!
- We ALWAYS thank the lockmaster after we complete our lockage

The Bridges

- Always make sure you have a list of all bridges for each waterway. You'll want to confirm bridge clearances based on current conditions. For example, the first low bridge on the Cal Sag leaving Chicago has a recorded clearance of 24' clearance, but due to the historically high water in 2019 (+ 4ft), we cleared it with a ½ inch to spare!
- As with locks, attempt to verify any bridge issues prior to reaching them. Navigation Alerts are helpful.
- For our Aquila 44, we moved the VHF antennae to the port side arch. It's affixed to a swivel that can easily be reached allowing us to drop the antennae for bridge clearance. Our air draft with the antennae down is 19.1' with our anchor light the highest point. Carefully measure your own vessel.
- It's important to understand that once you get to the Hudson River, you will move into fresh water with its lack of salinity. Our previous boat was a 52' Hatteras with a 5'2" draft. We quickly discovered that in fresh water, the draft increased to 5'8"-5'11" depending on how much fuel and water we had on board. The fresh water increased draft can affect the 6' depth guaranteed on the Trent Severn and can impact the Illinois River 19.7' railroad bridge where lower is a good thing! Again, know your boat's clearances in all directions.



The Tows and Barges

- The undeniable kings of the waterways are the tow boat captains. This is especially true on the inland rivers. They are moving massive vessels with little to no maneuverability. They need to be respected and listened too! Always request a passage and wait for clear instructions. AIS is critical on the rivers allowing you to contact the tows.
- Contacting a tow will sound something like this: “River Tow, River Tow, River Tow, this is the One Eye Dog. We are requesting to pass on your twos.” River Tow will respond with directives – pass on the ones or twos, do not pass until after the bend, there’s a shallow spot ahead, etc. Always confirm their directions! You may not agree, but again, understand they know these waters and they have less maneuverability than you. Always, thank them after you safely pass.
- Be careful of the tow’s prop wash! If the waterway is narrow or shallow, the prop wash can cause you to lose control of your vessel. If there’s an issue, ALWAYS give 5 short blasts on your horn!
- Please know the tow captains can be extremely hard to understand! Bad radios, those wonderful yet sometimes heavy Southern accents and quick responses generally mean your vessel’s captain needs to pay close attention when contacting a tow! The One Eye Dog crew often look at each other and say “what did he say?” Don’t be afraid to confirm if you didn’t understand!

What's a One or a Two

- The Ones or Twos are bells or whistles. Of course, these days we all use the radio and there are no bells or whistles.
- Depending on direction – Ones or Twos are the side you will pass on.
- Head on with a Tow – The Ones mean your passing port to port and the Twos will be starboard to starboard.
- Overtaking a Tow – The Ones will be your port passing the tow's starboard and Twos will be your starboard passing on the tow's port.



Marinas and Anchoring

- We have had no issues finding marina space for our Aquila 44 (or our previous Loop boat, the 52' Hatteras). We are generally on a T head or wall. A few times we were even on the fuel dock for overnight. We always check in advance.
- There have been times we didn't get into our first marina of choice or on the exact dates we wanted, but we've never been "homeless." Be flexible on the Loop!
- Anchoring out on the Loop is required in a few locations on the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway. Needless to say, make sure your ground tackle is in working condition. We traveled with a boat whose anchor was ripped off on the Tenn-Tom this year due to bad anchor rode.





The One Eye Dog

- We are always happy to answer your questions regarding the Aquila 44, living aboard full time or America's Great Loop! You can follow us on Facebook at #theoneeyedog or contact us at oneeyedogcrew@gmail.com
- We wish you a wonderful Great Loop Adventure! Make sure you join America's Great Loop Cruiser's Association for more info on the Great Loop.