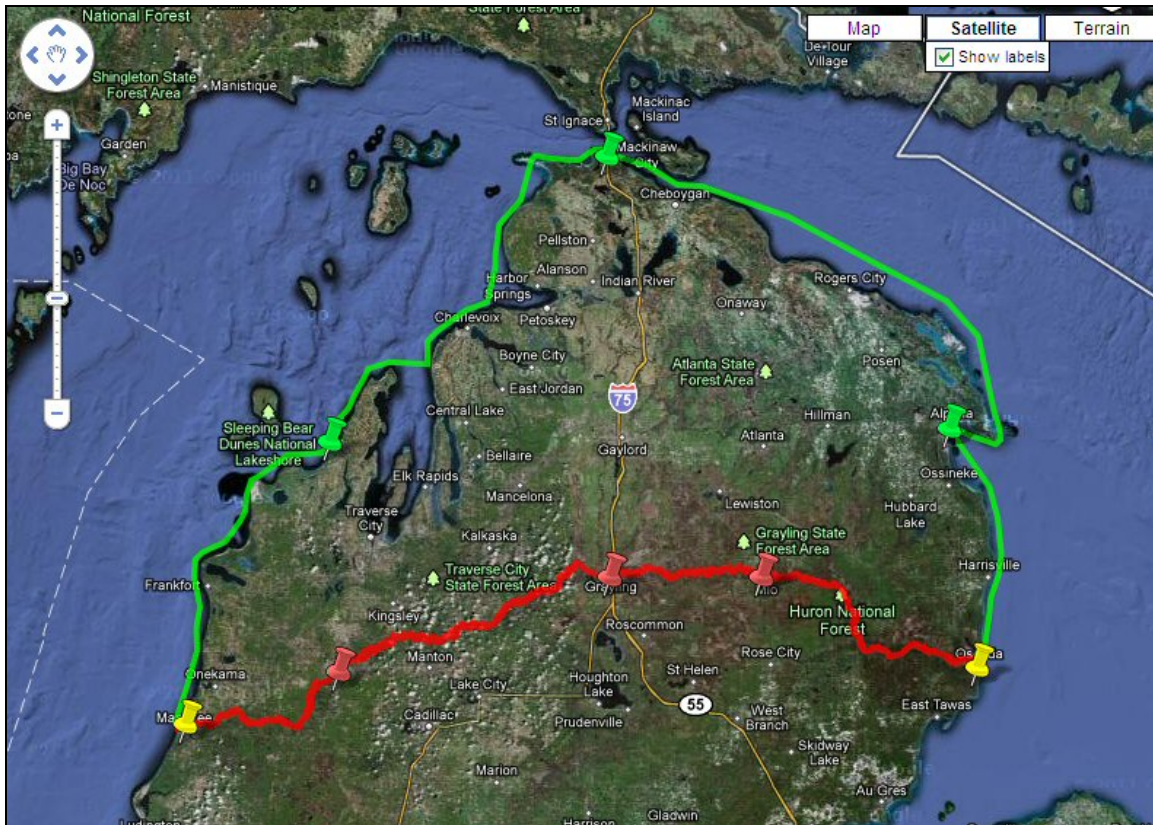


**The Tip of the Mitt Adventure as experienced by Gary Hirsch and Uncle Al in *Solje W1321***  
**Winner of the *Ted Davis Memorial Trophy* for the best North American log of 2011**

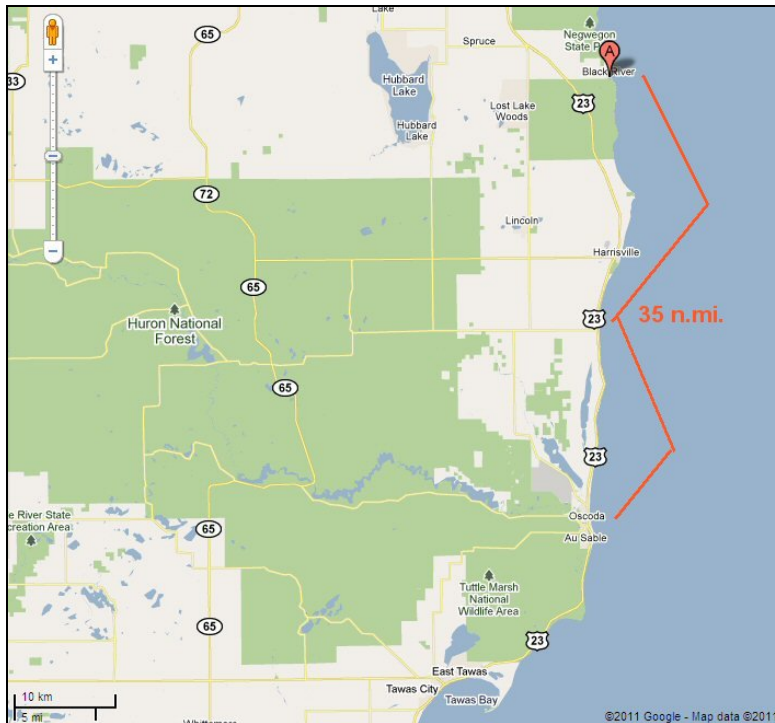
It's hard to believe that months have gone by since Uncle Al and Gary Hirsch completed the "Tip of the Mitt Challenge". But here we are going through the pictures and great memories once more.



This event started in Oscoda, MI on Lake Huron and ended in Manistee, MI, on Lake Michigan. There were two routes. The inside route took one across the state using the AuSable River and the Manistee River. This is not the preferred route for a Wayfarer, so we took the outside route that would have us sailing approximately 300 miles: northwest on Lake Huron, thru the Straits of Mackinac, and then southwest on Lake Michigan to the finish.



We had almost perfect weather for the trip, i.e. brisk winds on most days and only two days with storms. There was one other sailboat in the challenge, a Norseboat 17.5 (*above*). It turned out that boat for boat, the Wayfarer was much faster and could point much better. Even downwind, we had the advantage. What the Norseboat lacked in performance, its hardy sailors made up for by rowing. They repeatedly rowed past us during the night while we enjoyed our rest. Then the next day, we would leapfrog them to the next checkpoint. It was quite fun demoralizing the competition by taking a much more relaxed approach to the adventure. Which is not to say that we didn't have some excitement.



The previous day, we had had a nice south wind with more of the same forecast for day 1. Well, the first surprise was a brisk north wind right as we strolled down to the boat 10 minutes before the start.



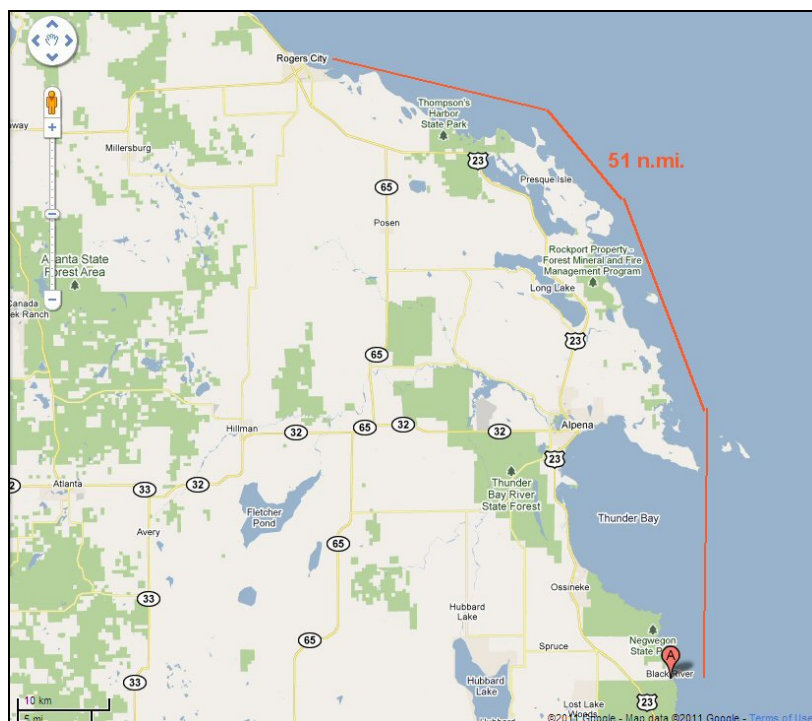


The Norseboat was first to get sails up and head north, but we quickly passed them once under way. Uncle Al, the consummate photo hound, suggested that we heave to for a chance to get some pictures of the Norseboat. Then we were off once more. The breeze lasted until about 4 PM, where we finally found ourselves becalmed short of any of our planned stopping points. I had brought new oars, but they weren't a good fit for the oar locks and Gary was a speedy convert to Uncle Al's anti-rowing views.



The oars did help get us into a somewhat sheltered area in two feet of water with some reef protection from the big lake. We set up the boom tent, poured the wine and toasted a great beginning.

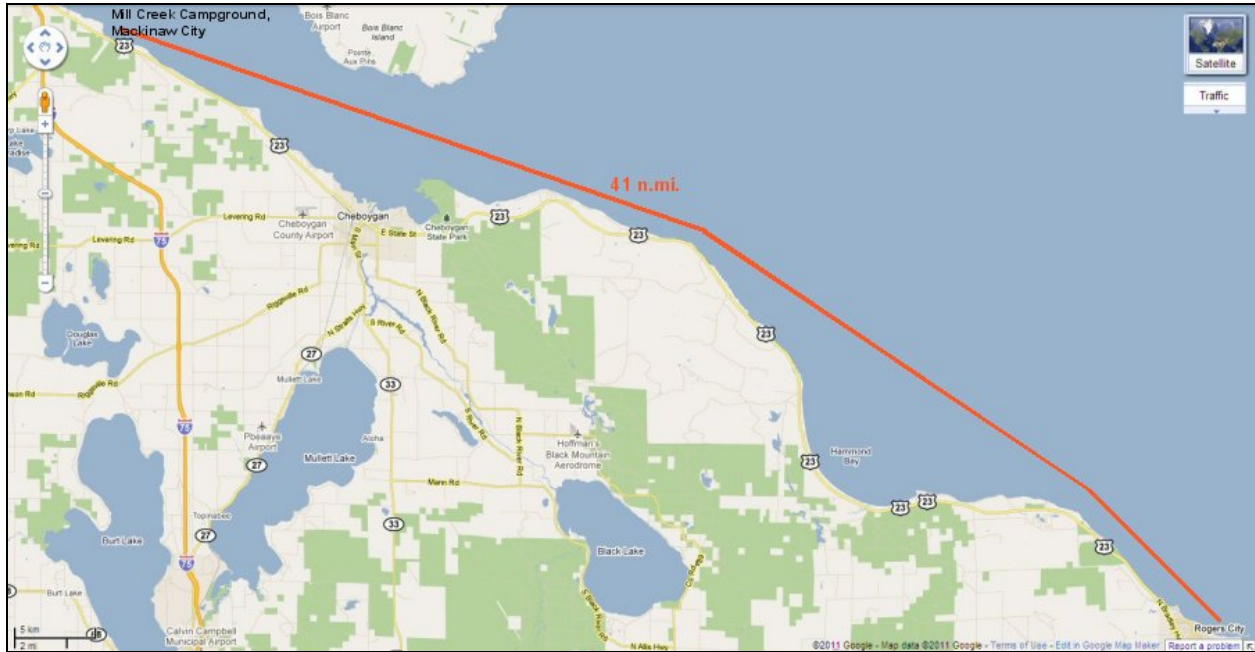




Day 2 dawned with a brisk wind from the south-east, which sent us off across Thunder Bay at a fast pace. Once across the bay, we phoned our position to Jack and Joan Cramer at the Alpena checkpoint and were somewhat dismayed to find that we were last to report in. Even the kayaks had passed us in the night. The good wind had us charging North until it began to fade about 3 PM. No sign of our competition. At 4 PM we were approaching Rogers City and decided that a motel would lift our spirits if not our standing in the challenge. Gary radioed ahead to reserve us a slip at the marina. It took some doing, but the nice young lady finally gave us permission to come in under sail and we soon justified her gamble on our skills. After a fine dinner in the downtown restaurant, Gary decided to walk down to the boat to get his book and reading glasses. As he approached the dock, he was surprised to see the Norseboat in the slip next to ours. Although they had been instructed to keep the plan from us, the dock hands revealed to Gary that our competition had come ashore for a shower and were planning to head back out right after a restaurant meal. Gary promptly walked up which provided a surprise and a very cordial visit. Grant and Vlad were worn out from the previous night's rowing efforts but nonetheless planned a repeat. Gary told them that our only concern was that we were having trouble finding a place to replenish our limited supply of beer. They offered to leave us some since they had plenty of beer but little time to indulge. As the Norseboat crew trudged off towards the marina, Gary went back to our warm motel and filled Uncle Al in on the developments.



Day 3 started at 7 AM when we thought there might be a slight breeze developing. After hitching a ride with a local sheriff's deputy to the marina we discovered was that the Norseboaters had indeed left us some beers. But that was the only good news: we were dismayed to see a flat calm on the lake – and a light drizzle. It didn't take Uncle Al long to suggest a return to the motel. We tried again at 11 AM. This time we had enough breeze to move us along. But it looked like it would be a long slog to Mackinaw City, and we spent some time pondering bailout options.



However, once we rounded 40-Mile Point, the wind picked up and kept building all afternoon. We were soon flying along under the big yellow spinnaker, often approaching 10 knots.



By late afternoon, we could make out the Mill Creek Campground, our second checkpoint. When we checked in by phone, we were surprised to find out that we had arrived only about 6 hours after the Norseboat, which had left Rogers City with a 15-hour lead and which was now stuck at the campground, being unable to get off the lee shore. Al immediately saw this as a job for Wayfarer Man or in this case, his sidekicks, Gary and Al. Perhaps we could help by towing the Norseboat off its beach (*below*)?

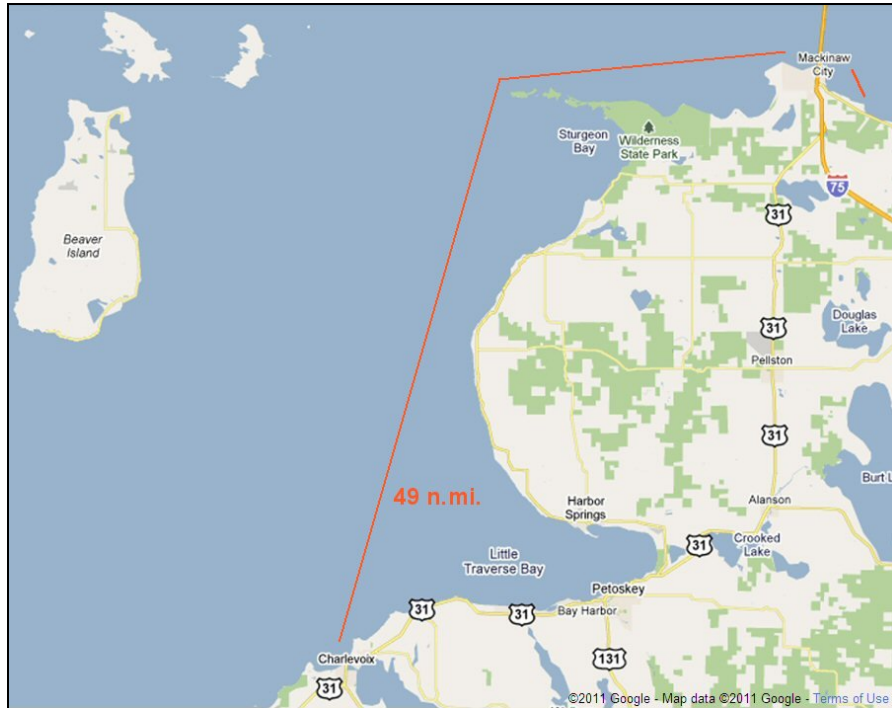


The closer we got, the simpler it looked. Until we suddenly ran aground with our rudder - about 300 yards off shore. We quickly luffed up to close-hauled, got the rudder half up, the board a quarter down, and tacked as soon as our speed was sufficient (*below left*). We were a bit puzzled though. Eager as Grant and Vlad, the Crazy Russian, were to move along in their Norseboat, why didn't they just walk their boat out to where we were, and just hop in and sail away??? Even out here the water was barely knee-deep, and no waves to speak of. Turns out Grant did not want to risk damage to his \$20,000 baby.



After anchoring in a somewhat protected cove that gave us a clear view of the mighty Mackinac Bridge framed by a sunset, we retired to a pristinely kept camping cabin for the night. We enjoyed some campfire stories and refreshments with Jack and Joan and others until 11 PM.

In a way, we had a particularly early start on Day 4. While up at 3 AM to dispose of some of the earlier refreshments, we encountered Grant and Vladimir getting ready to shove off. The previous evening, they had asked for our assistance in getting their boat off the shore. They said they would come back and roust us out of bed when they were ready to go. The somewhat dreaded call never came though. Thankfully we were spared this ordeal at that ungodly hour since the wind had died down in the night.



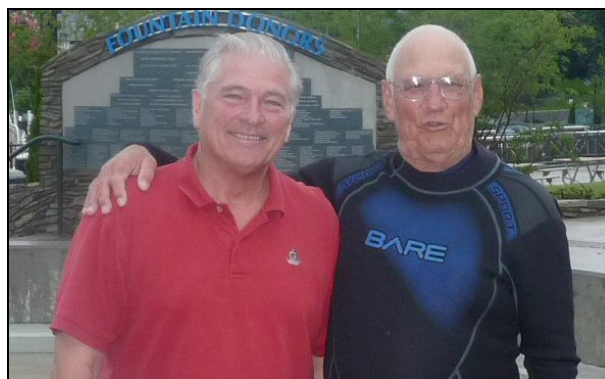
By 8 AM we were ready for a spinnaker run under the bridge in a light wind. But, once we entered Lake Michigan, the easterly wind started building and we eventually doused the spinnaker. We turned south into the main body of Lake Michigan at Gray's Reef. As the winds continued to increase, we reefed the main. Then we rolled up some of the jib. Further livening up our afternoon were a couple of electrical storms, one to the west and one to the south. Luckily, we crossed in front of most of the storm moving west to east and got only one near-by lightning bolt. And most of the second one, moving in a north-westerly direction, had passed before we sailed into it and again there was just one close hit. By now we had doused the main and were flying along on a broad reach, frequently surfing down a wave with just the genoa up. Occasionally a wave came over the gunwales. We manned the pumps and kept going.



Our path across Little Traverse Bay to Charlevoix was a pretty wild ride in winds of up to 35 knots. But our relief at entering the rainy but less windy shelter of the piers at Charlevoix was short-lived. A contrary four-knot current along with the strong wind funneling down the channel gave up only inches with each tack even with our reefed main replacing the genoa. Al's quickly devised plan B was for Gary to take a bow line and jump onto a ladder, which would allow him to get up on the pier and tow us in. But before Gary could spring into action, a voice came faintly through wind and rain: "Throw me the rope!" Talk about a guardian angel!! It was the ubiquitous Jack Cramer, running towards us on the pier.



Much to our relief, the rain-blurred form of Jack Cramer took our painter and towed us into the harbor (*above left*). It turned out that the Cramers had, as they did throughout the trip, followed us along the shore while tracking our progress via our SPOT and had gotten there just in perfect time. And let me tell you that those Erie Canal barge mules had nothing on Jack who towed us into the basin with no problem at all!! Thanks a ton, Jack!! We found out later from the harbormaster that a strong easterly always funnels part of the huge expanse of Lake Charlevoix (just to the east) out into Lake Michigan by way of the marina basin (*above right*) and this narrow entrance.



And speaking of the harbormaster, a lovely gentleman named Hal Evans (*above left*), we discovered that he has a Canadian connection. Upon learning that Uncle Al is Canadian, Hal explained his connection as



follows: His grandfather's grandfather was a lumberjack who was working near North Bay. Had we heard of North Bay? Oh yes indeed; we have one of our best regattas there each year, Al pointed out. Well, it turns out that they had a test of lumberjack skills, the winner of which would have the little town where they were working named after him. Hal Evans' ancestor, a man by the name of Callander, was the winner. Small world! We were too exhausted to celebrate that evening and after long luxurious showers at the lovely, well equipped and welcoming Charlevoix Marina, slept in warm beds (*below*).



The following morning, it was still raining and the forecast was for more heavy weather. The captains and crews of several big boats, sail and power, thought we were crazy as they watched us make our preparations to continue our journey. Departure was down-current and thus without trauma.



Out on the lake, we noticed a sail ahead of us in the distance. It was our competition, who had sat out the storm with some kayakers on the north side of Little Traverse Bay until the wee hours of the

morning. As we caught up, we had a nice chat with Vlad and Grant, and of course, the cameras on both boats were clicking. Once through their lee, we promptly hoisted the spinnaker and slowly pulled away.



The day was not without more excitement, however. After we had rounded Traverse Point, a squall came through with lightning and heavy rain. We elected to drop sails and sit in the bottom of the boat as far away from mast and shrouds as possible. Soon after the squall had passed, we received a visit from a Coast Guard inflatable. Wine cups were quickly stowed. Apparently, someone on shore had thought we were in trouble and reported us. We took pictures and waved good-bye to them.



We ended the day in Leland and figured we had earned a night in the very nice accommodations at the Falling Waters Lodge. Grant and Vlad soon rolled into town as well, and our bad example finally ruined their roughing-it-only status. They, too, decided to spend the night in Leland, and when Jack and Joan, our guardian angels also appeared, there was nothing to be done but to celebrate our survival at *The Cove*, right across from the Lodge. Which we did, in very tasty style. The sound of rushing water (*see view out our door below left*) was quite soothing and we slept well.



Day 6 began with rain, fog and little wind. After breakfast in the local diner and one more peek at the conditions (*above right*), we went back to bed. We didn't leave the harbor until late morning, about 3 hours after the Norseboat. They liked rowing and we did not. Besides they probably felt the need to purify themselves after being contaminated by the previous night's sumptuous meal and comfortable accommodations.



Light winds on the nose kept us from making very many miles on this day. Fortunately Gary had re-provisioned *Solje* in Leland and the new, even better version (*above right*) of the Starbucks VIA coffee that Gary was able to whip up at a minute's notice with his handy little mini-cooker was just the ticket on the damp, cool and foggy day. The winds were patchy and shifty all day and despite our numerous tacks to keep sailing the more favorable angle to the rhumbline, we found ourselves only about 19 n. mi. from Leland at the Sleeping Bear Dunes around 7 PM. We made the decision to stop and sleep until the wind filled in from the favorable direction promised by the weather radio.



We anchored off the giant sand dune (*above left*), assured that any mishap would result in a soft landing. Above right is what Grant and Vlad saw as they rowed past after we had covered up and gone to sleep. As Vlad told it around a Manistee campfire, the sequence of events went like this: “There’s a boat anchored off the point,” said Vlad. “Perhaps they’ll have the kettle on and we can get them to give us a cup of tea.” A few minutes later: “It’s a small boat.” Later still: “It has chines ... shhhhhh ...”

Around midnight the expected wind shift came in and caused us to start bouncing as we were now just off a lee shore. We briefly contemplated sticking with the original plan to sail all night, but quickly decided that it was more trouble than it was worth to get out of the cozy sleeping bags, etc. We knew this decision would likely cost us a chance to win the “race” and we found out the next morning when we checked in that Team Norseboat, Grant and Vlad, had beaten us to Manistee and the finish. But we were in no way upset as we brewed another Bailey’s Irish VIA to toast our competition who really deserved to finish first since they had so valiantly rowed and worked so much harder than we had.



Day 7: We got under way before 7 AM when the waves had increased to the point where sleep was impossible – even for Uncle Al. The final day’s broad reach down to Manistee was quick and uneventful except for the pit stop at Point Betsie Light. The waves were captive in the small cove where we landed and instead of the gradual slope, the depth went quickly down to 4 feet. Uncle Al got to test his wetsuit once more but found the effort worthwhile when he was subsequently able to climb a fence and find some much needed facilities in the nick of time.

In Manistee, Stephanie drove into the launch ramp with the trailer just as we docked in the early afternoon. After a short celebration, we retired to the campground where we had rented a cabin to be shared with our competition. We found out that we had passed them on Day 6 in the fog and then they had again rowed past us during the night while we slept – a story very nicely told by Vlad around the evening’s campfire and inserted earlier in this log.

The next day concluded the event with a dinner where stories were shared, awards were given and proper acknowledgements made to the volunteers. Goodbyes were postponed until the Sunday morning to allow for a proper celebration of a very successful event. What an adventure!

Gary Hirsch with help from Uncle Al and of course *Solje* W1321