

# Apostle Islands

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore  
Wisconsin



## Oak Island



photo by Terry Schoenberg

Oak Island rises to 1,081 feet above sea level, making it the highest point in the Apostle Islands. Wind, waves, and ice have carved spectacular features here including the highest bluffs on Wisconsin's Lake Superior shoreline and the Hole-in-the-Wall sea arch.

### Ojibwe, Lumberjacks, and the "King"

Native people have camped and harvested food on Oak Island for centuries. Nineteenth century land surveys note the location of a maple "sugar bush" on the island used by the Ojibwe. In the 1850s, Benjamin Armstrong from Alabama built a cabin on the island and lived there for about six years. He learned the Ojibwe language and served as translator and advisor to tribal elders, accompanying them to Washington to meet with Presidents Fillmore and Lincoln.

As early as the 1850s, a cordwood business was flourishing here, supplying fuel to passing steamships. The island was subsequently logged for pine in the 1880s and 1890s, and for hemlock and hardwoods throughout the 1920s. As many as six lumber camps, including those of the Schroeder and R. D. Pike Lumber Companies, once dotted the

shores of Oak Island. Some of the clearings and remnants of these camps are still evident today.

During and after the Great Depression, commercial fishermen used parts of the island as base camps. One of these men, Martin Kane, took up permanent residence in an old lumber camp shack near the sandspit, where he lived for over 25 years as the friendly "King" of Oak Island. Martin made his living fishing with gill nets and set lines. He sold the whitefish and lake trout that he caught to the Booth Company in Bayfield. A 1946 article from the Ashland Daily Press explained that the shack where Martin Kane lived with two dogs and a cat had a bed, a table, one chair, and a stove. Sparks from the stove ignited a fire that burned about 4,000 acres of the island in October, 1943.

### Bear Habitat

The 1946 Ashland Daily Press article stated that, "Oak Island is the principal habitat for bears among the Apostle Islands, and Martin Kane has shot more bears than probably anyone in the region during the years he has lived alone there. One season he shot seven." Although Stockton Island now supports a larger population of bears than Oak Island, the island continues to provide year round habitat for bears. Oak Island's proximity to the mainland makes it an easy swim for bears looking for new territory. Bears and bear sign are frequently seen by island visitors.

In the 1940s, Martin Kane told stories about bears that entered his fish house to take freshly caught lake trout or ransacked his cabin for a five pound sack of sugar. He used a 10-gauge shotgun to deal with "bear trouble". In the 21st century, improperly stored food continues to lure bears to island campsites. In 2003,

seven bears that had become habituated to human food were trapped and removed from the island. This process forced the closing of the island to most campers and day users for about a month.

Visitors must take precautions to help keep this from happening again. Never approach or feed a bear. Keep a distance of at least 50 yards, even for photography. Don't lure or allow bears to feel comfortable around campsites, docks, and picnic areas. Store food and garbage in the bearproof food lockers provided at campsites on Oak Island. Take steps to reduce food odors. If you encounter a bear in a visitor use area; make yourself look big, bang pots, yell, make noise until the bear leaves the area, and report the encounter to park staff as soon as possible.



Bearproof food locker

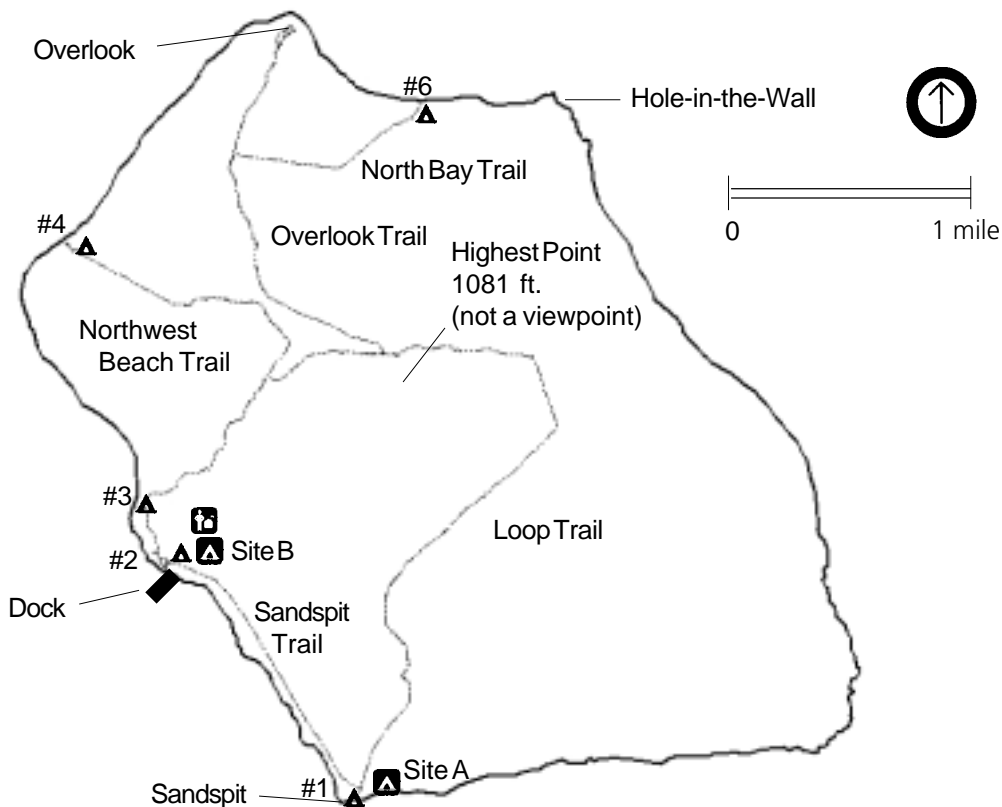
# Oak Island

## Island Dimensions

Length - 3.5 miles  
Width - 2.5 miles  
Shoreline - 12 miles  
Size - 5,078 acres

## Key

- ▲ Campsite
- ▲ Group Campsite
- 🏠 Ranger Station



## Trails

Oak Island has 11.5 miles of maintained hiking trails. Off-trail travel can be treacherous.



### LOOP TRAIL, 5.2 mi. long

This horseshoe-shaped trail begins at the dock, loops north through the center of the island, then turns south to the sandspit. Walk over the highest point in the lakeshore, along ancient beach lines, and past the old "sugar bush".

### NORTHWEST BEACH TRAIL, 1.6 mi. long

This trail leaves the loop trail 1.2 miles north of the dock and leads to a secluded beach and campsite #4 (2.8 miles from the dock).

### OVERLOOK TRAIL, 1.8 mi. long

Beginning 1.7 miles from the dock, this trail departs the loop trail near the highest point on the island. It leads to an overlook 200 feet above the lake with a view of ten islands and the "Hole-in-the-Wall" sea arch. The overlook is 3.5 miles from the dock.

### NORTH BAY TRAIL, 1.1 mi. long

Meanders down a ravine to a campsite at the beach. Campsite #6 is 3.9 miles from the dock.

### SANDSPIT TRAIL, 1.5 mi. long

Travels along the shoreline to the beach at the sandspit. Campsites and an outhouse are located here. To protect the sandspit's fragile plant community, walk only on established trails, on boardwalks, or on the beach.



## Camping, Hunting, and Boating

Camping permits are required for all camping in the national lakeshore. The permit system allows campers to reserve campsites in advance. A non-refundable administrative fee is charged for processing a permit. Camping permits can be obtained at the Bayfield visitor center or by calling (715)779-3397 ext. 6. Oak Island has five individual campsites and two group campsites. Campsites may occasionally be closed due to bear activity or to preserve sensitive resources. For detailed camping information, request the free brochure entitled "Camping".

A special deer hunt for hunters using black powder rifles takes place on Oak and Basswood islands in

October. A limited number of permits are available. Contact the park's chief of protection for details.

A wooden dock is located in the middle of the west side of the island. Maximum water depth at the end of this dock varies, but is usually about six feet. Docking is permitted as space allows. Dock space is reserved at certain times for excursion boats.

Oak Island provides several possible anchorage areas, depending on wind conditions. Boaters are encouraged to monitor marine weather forecasts.

## Leave No Trace Outdoor Ethics

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore offers visitors the opportunity to experience and enjoy a variety of natural and cultural features. Visitors must do their part to help protect park resources. Please follow the seven principles of "Leave No Trace" outdoor ethics:

- 1) Plan Ahead and Prepare
- 2) Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
- 3) Dispose of Waste Properly
- 4) Leave What You Find
- 5) Minimize Campfire Impacts
- 6) Respect Wildlife
- 7) Be Considerate of Other Visitors

Beaches are some of the park's most popular attractions. They also support fragile plant communities. Please walk near the water line or on

established trails and take care not to trample beach grasses and lichen. Please camp only on durable surfaces like sand, rock, or leaf litter. Where vault toilets are not available for human waste, dig a hole 6-8 inches deep and 200 feet from camp and the nearest water body. Cover the hole after use. Campfires must be built in fire receptacles where provided. Burn only dead, fallen wood. Be prepared to pack out whatever you pack in. Do not remove any artifacts from the island's historic sites. These Leave No Trace practices are caring activities designed to decrease the negative effects that users have on the environment.

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