

JUST WING IT OR DO YOUR HOMEWORK?

There are two basic approaches to doing the America's Great Loop Cruise. You can either decide to "Wing It" or "Do Your Homework".

If you have read "Honey Lets Get A Boat" by Ron and Eva Stob you know that they were among those who virtually Winged It! (if you haven't, it is must reading!). The important thing is that they not only completed the loop, but they recognized that others who would follow after them, could benefit - immensely - from an association for those who were still in the dreaming stages. A self help association for new members with the help of fellow members who have been there and done that - to help the newbees do their homework and for those actually on the Loop to help each other along the route.

Years ago, before the America's Great Loop Cruisers Association was formed by Ron and Eva Stob, most people doing the Loop had read an article or two about the Great Circle Route or America's Great Loop Cruise or perhaps a couple of books about this fantastic boating adventure of a lifetime. They had virtually no choice but to wing it. Yes, there were some guide books available but many didn't find out about these resources unless they did a lot of homework or they owned a Trawler and/or went to a Trawler Fest rendezvous with Great Loop seminars. And, many didn't (and still don't) go to Trawler Fests because they do not own a Trawler but plan to do the Great Loop anyway.

The Two J's V (John and Judy Gill) were very fortunate to attend one of the Stob's Great Loop seminars, at a Trawler Fest in Solomons, MD. We had previously become Charter Members of AGLCA. As Life Members of the United States Power Squadrons, we have taken many Squadron courses, and have over 50 years of boating experience. Even so, we were amazed by how much we learned in just three days! At this point in our Great Loop education process, information was Skimpy, Sketchy and very Scattered! One had to work for it. Judy, a school librarian, subscribed to many of the regional boating magazines -- Lakeland Boating, Heartland Boating and the Chesapeake Bay magazine, etc. Articles were read, clipped, notes taken and filed away over a three year period - categorized by the regions of the voyage. Many lists were made of things to do and things to have aboard.

The AGLCA affords its members a way to Short Cut the Homework Requirement before doing the Great Loop, and provides valuable information for those who are actually in route. Unfortunately far too many members do not seem to take advantage of all the benefits of AGLCA membership.

We participate in two Email chat lines, the AGLCA (Steve Kromer) list for current and a few past loopers, and Trawler World's greatlooplist. We are frequently amazed at some of the postings and questions about things such as: Where to buy charts while in route; Lack of twin 30 amp or 50 amp electrical power and the need for Splitters (Y adapters or reverse adapters) and Reducers; Complaints about the lack of WiFi, WWAN service, and/or Digital Data Cell Phone service for Email and on-line banking, etc.; Height and/or Draft limitations on various parts of the America's Great Loop Cruise; Which route to take; No Black Water discharge zones and the requirement in many areas to dismantle overboard discharge plumbing; How and where to have mail forwarded; Things to see and do (don't miss places); What to do about potable water and the availability,

transportation and storage of bottled water; Availability of good restaurants every night; Where there are DRY COUNTIES where no alcoholic beverages can be purchased or served at restaurants (now that is important to many boaters); Even where one could find finger nail salons near marinas; and the list goes on and on. A must homework book to buy is "The Great Loop" by Skipper Bob <<http://skipperbob.home.att.net/>> for basic information about each section of the Great Loop.

It's not that the questions or concerns are in any way stupid or too elementary - it's just that they should have been asked and answered BEFORE starting out on a 6,000 to 7,000 mile boat trip, which may last the better part of a year or more. In many cases, it is too late to make changes or do anything about a potential problem. We actually met a couple who had already started the Loop on their brand new 57 foot motor yacht, with 5+ foot draft and a 23 foot air height. They hadn't done a speck of homework and were most upset to learn that "Not on that boat - You simply can not do the Loop". Another couple with a 53 foot motor yacht asked us what they should do about their hard top which resulted in a 23 foot air height. We suggested that they consider having it hinged before leaving, or make arrangements to have it taken down before the Erie Canal and/or Chicago and reinstalled later like sail boats who have their masts stepped. They rejected both ideas, so we told them to buy a chain saw.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK, COME TO LEARN, COME TO SHARE:

A major solution to the America's Great Loop Cruise "homework" problem is to attend one or more of the America's Great Loop Cruisers Association rendezvous: In the Fall from October 3 - 6, 2005, Rogersville, AL at the Joe Wheeler State Park on the Tennessee River and/or in the Spring from April 10-13, 2006, in Beaufort, SC. at the Downtown Marina, Lady's Island Marina and Port Royal Marina with Seminars and dinners at Best Western Sea Island Hotel across from the Downtown Marina in Beaufort. Spending 3 or 4 days at an AGLCA rendezvous will be the best use of time and money and it will save you far more than it cost. You will meet and hear the presentations of the the foremost cruising guide authors, many AGLCA LOOPERS (those who have completed the loop and earned their BaccaLOOPerate degrees), others who are on the Loop with you, and what we call Future Loopers or wannabes. This is truly a self help association where we all learn from one another. So, come to learn and to share the experiences of your boating area with others.

John and Judy Gill
Two J's V, a 36 ft. Carver Mariner
Slip E-26, Sassafras Harbor Marina, Georgetown, MD
AGLCA Loopers