

GLSS – Passage through the Soo Locks

Purpose: This document provided information about passage through the Soo Locks at Sault Saint Marie, between Lake Superior and Lake Huron.

Discussion: For the Trans Superior Solo Challenge boats typically have locked through together using either the US or Canadian Locks. Detailed instructions are provided at the skippers meeting. Since this race also includes crewed boats they usually tie up to the wall in the locks and the singlehanded boats tie up alongside the crewed boats which makes it easier for us and easy to chat with fellow skippers. If one is passing through the locks individually more detailed information is provided below. There is no cost to pass through the locks. The Canadian Lock, referred to as the Canadian Canal is a much reduced freighter lock and only provided passage for pleasure boats during day light hours. Stay out of the way of the freighters; one especially does not want to get between the wall and a freighter as they occasionally slide the wall. They move slowly so maneuvering around them is fairly easy. Contact the freighter or the Soo Locks Control if you have any questions. If you have AIS (Automatic Identification System) it will give you a good idea of what the traffic is doing at the locks. Chart and pictures provide on last two pages below.

Communications: Communications with both locks is done in low power on VHF channel 14 but they also monitor Channel 16. Monitor Channel 14 to keep track of what is going on with the locks. Contact the locks about 15 minutes before you will arrive at the locks to let them know you want passage. The call sign and name for the US Locks is “WUD-31” and “Soo Locks”. The Canadian Locks are called the “Canadian Canal”. Occasionally boats get confused and so one can also call “US Soo Locks” or “Canadian Soo Locks”. On my way out of the lock I always call and thank the lock control center for a good passage.

US Locks: There are four US locks but only the southern two are in use. The southernmost lock is the McArthur lock. It is 800 feet long and is probably the lock you will be directed to. It is the lock closest to the US shore. The next lock over is the Poe Lock which is 1200 feet long. It is the only lock that can pass the largest 11 freighters that are 1000 feet long. You will be instructed when it is your turn to pass through the lock but you must not proceed until you have a green light. You will be instructed which side to tie to but it will usually be the south side, the one closest to the US coast. Be sure to have your fenders out on the correct side. Sometimes several small boats will pass through the locks at the same time and each will normally tie up separately to the wall. Lines will be supplied by a line handling looking over the side of the lock and waiting for you. One person can handle both lines on a smaller boat but two line handlers makes it easier. As the lock is filled or drained it may be necessary to fend off the wall which is fairly rough and has some notches that can catch fenders. Once the lock is filled or drained the safety cable boom and gates will be opened. Don't let go of the lines until you get the green light. Try to coil and tie the lines so the line handler above does no need to handle a wet line. Move out of the lock quickly when given the signal. There are bridges across the west side of the canal approach and they will usually see you coming and open without signal.

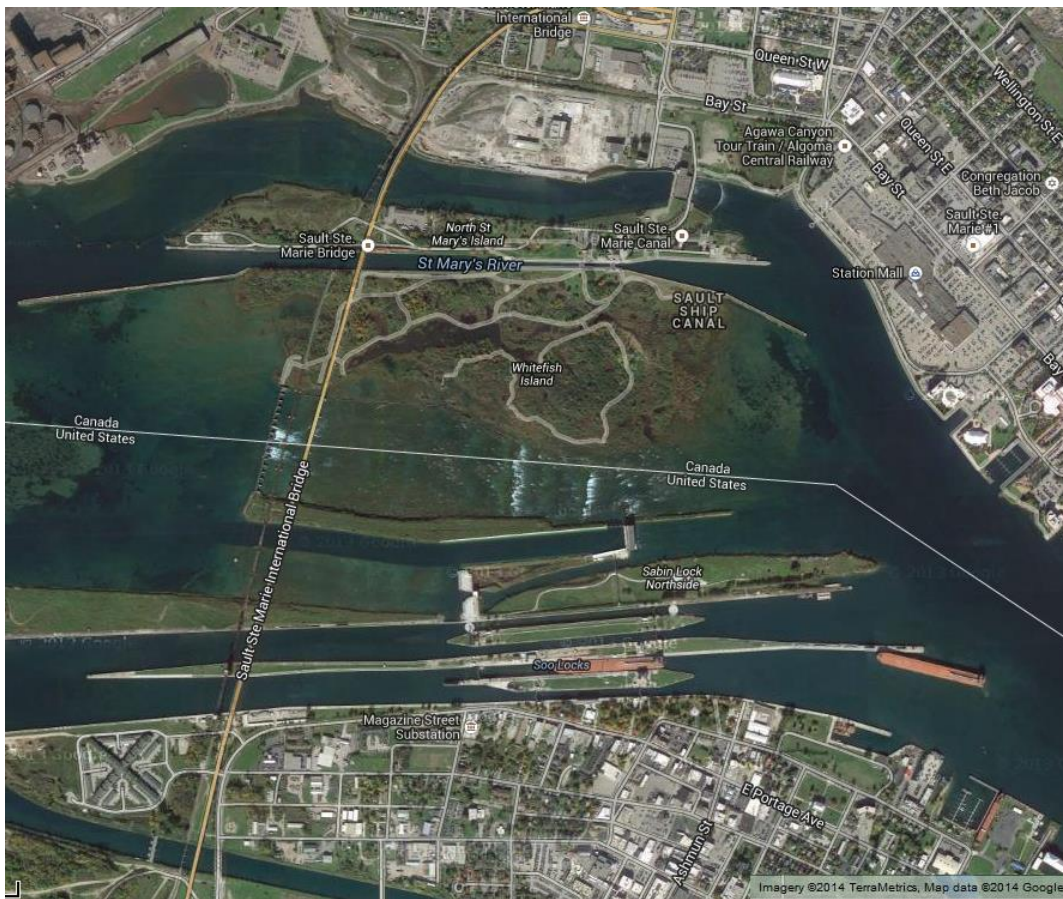
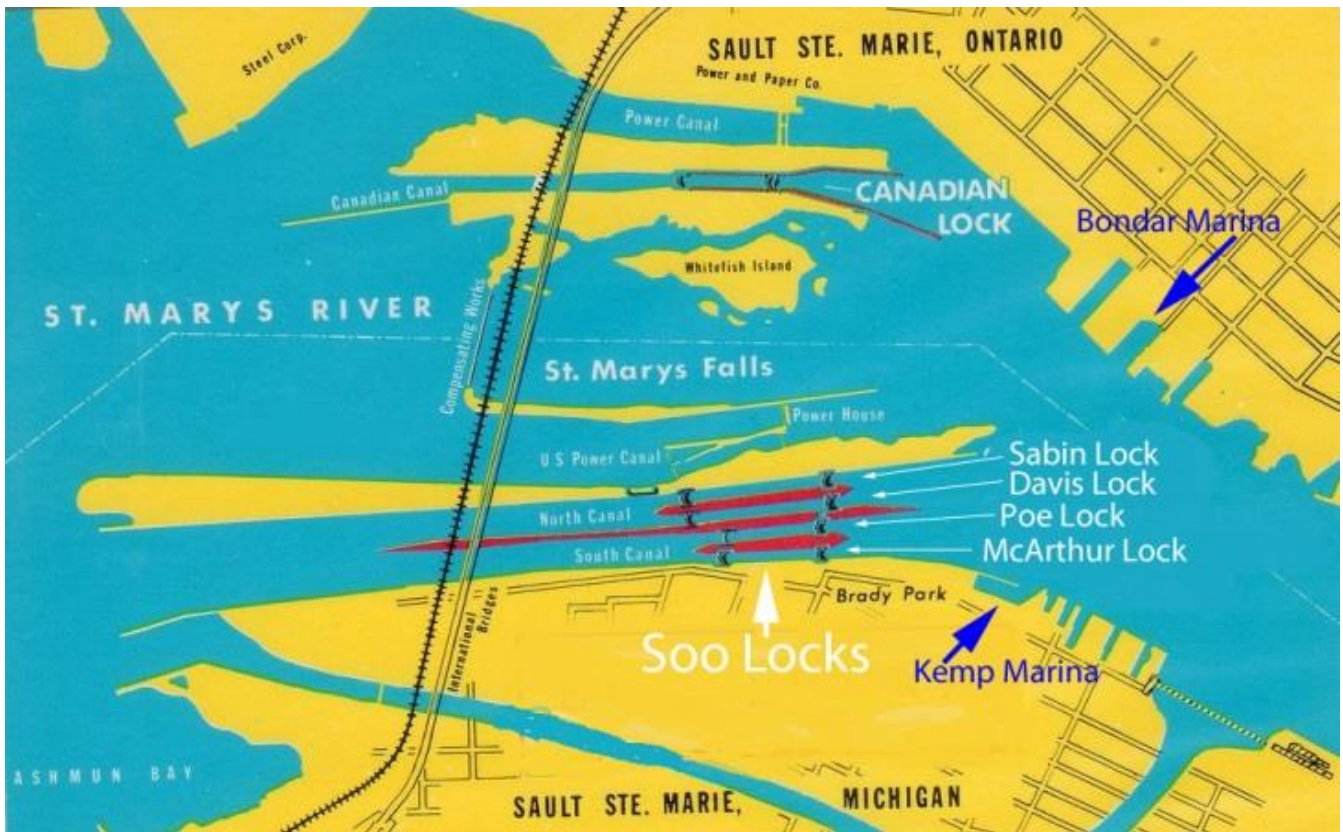
Canadian Locks: The single Canadian lock referred to as the “Canadian Canal” is a commercial freighter lock that has been reworked and reduced in size to only handle pleasure boats. Draft is about 8 feet. It is only operated during day light hours and these vary. The tie up system is different than the US Soo Locks. The Locks have plastic covered vertical steel cables along the lock walls. One places a dock line around the cables and in theory as the boat rises or falls the dock line slides up and down. Unfortunately last time I went through this lock the cables were in bad conditions so it is necessary to watch that your dock lines do not get caught. Be sure to wait for the lights to enter the lock and to exit the lock. As this lock caters to small boats one may go through with a tour boat or a number of small boats.

Marinas: There are two marinas on the Lake Huron or east side of the locks. They are Roberta Bondar Marina in Canada, and George Kemp Marina on the US side. Both marinas typically have room for overnight transients and both have pump out and fuel docks. Contact information is provided below. Reservations are accepted but not usually necessary based on my experience.

References:

- [Soo Locks Visitor Center FAQs](#)
- Roberta Bondar Marina
99 Foster Drive, Sault Ste. Marie, ON P6A 5N1, Canada
Phone: 705-759-5430
Contact on VHF Channel 16
- George Kemp Marina
485 East Park Place Sault Ste. Marie MI 49783-2049
Phone: (906) 635-7670
[Make Online Reservations](#) or Call: 800-447-2757
Contact on VHF Channel 9 or 16

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**Canadian Locks above
and left, US Locks Below**

