

# St. Lawrence Reverie

The dreamlike beauty of the 1000 Islands.

PHOTOS & TEXT BY IAN CORISTINE

*One of* the interesting aspects of capturing a perfect reflection is that the picture is equally viewable right side up or upside down. To get it, I paddled out in a canoe and then sat absolutely still for a considerable time waiting for the ripples to dissipate.

*To suggest* the St. Lawrence has different moods is a colossal understatement. From the deep blue of a clear summer morning to the first day of a deep freeze in late fall, the river offers an infinite variety of moods, all of them beautiful.



*When I* came across this small island with its wonderful natural harbor, it seemed too good to be true. I returned with a tape measure and was elated to find that my plane would fit with inches to spare. Better yet, the gentle slope at harbor's end allows me (and a friend) to taxi out of the water and tie down to bedrock, something absolutely necessary in occasionally violent storms.

I knew nothing of boating when I first came to the 1000 Islands. Beyond regulations and boat handling, there was also the small matter of shoals. I knew I'd never live long enough to know where they're all hidden, particularly as the fluctuation in water levels constantly changes the playing field. My solution is a jetboat with no propeller to lose and a very shallow draft. It has disadvantages, though. Slowing in weeds has left me powerless with a blocked intake, and the relatively flat bottom gives a punishing ride in rough water. The payoff is an ability to get me and my camera to places where propellers can't go.

My book, *Water, Wind and Sky*, happened by accident. There was no more a plan to do it than there was to stumble across this amazing place and become a three-season resident. The islands best reveal themselves from above, where the next shoreline isn't hiding the view beyond. When I found myself living on the St. Lawrence River with a plane immediately available to capture the magical moments that occasionally present themselves, I realized I had an opportunity, an obligation even, to share this privileged view from above.



*I confess.* This photo was set up, but could easily have happened just this way in years gone by. This Hutchinson Boat Works sedan from the Antique Boat Museum's extensive collection was built just downstream in Alexandria Bay, New York in 1931 and has graced the river much of the time since. Round Island's post office is the only remaining clue of the magnificent Hotel Frontenac, which burned down in 1911. Virtually all of the 1000 Islands' grand hotels succumbed to flames. Fortunately, many of the boats fared better.

*When the* St. Lawrence Seaway was completed in 1959, it was the realization of a dream that began in 1680, when Dollier de Casson started construction of a narrow, one-mile canal to skirt the Lachine Rapids near Montreal. A lack of funds prevented completion until 1824, long after the French regime had ended. One hundred and thirty-five years later, the Seaway opened, allowing ships access 2,342 miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean to the westernmost port at Duluth, Minnesota. Maximum size, determined by locks, is 740 feet in length and a 78-foot breadth, dimensions to which many ships (including the *Algowood*) have been specifically designed to meet.



*Occident Island's* boathouse currently serves as the only private island B&B in the 1000 Islands, providing close-up looks of passing ships as Rock Island Light stands sentinel upstream.



*Private bridges* are commonplace in the islands, but this one between Sport and Little Lehigh is one of the more ambitious. The Packers, who owned the Lehigh Valley Railroad in Pennsylvania, purchased Sport Island in 1872 for \$25 and put a guest house on Little Lehigh to the right. This elaborate iron bridge was built in two parts by the Bethlehem Iron Works.

*I think* of the first and last minutes of the day as “magic hour,” when the low angle of the sun intensifies color as it shines through the atmosphere. Here, the Lost Channel takes on hues that wouldn’t be seen any other time of day.



*Singer Sewing* Machine Co. president Frederick Bourne spent half a million dollars building his Dark Island castle at the turn of the century. Following his death, his daughter Marjorie expanded the castle and added an additional complex, which housed a squash court plus accommodations for staff. Marjorie was something of a party girl, but much of her “reign” over Singer Castle took place during Prohibition, which might have cramped the style of a less-resourceful woman. She purchased nearby Corn Island, in Canadian waters, to provide a place to legally keep her liquor. Whenever a party was planned, a boat would quietly slip across and discretely unload in the north boathouse, which connected to the castle via underground passageways. The empty “evidence” would be tossed into the river, much to the delight of today’s divers who still occasionally find antique bottles.



*These photos* were taken from *Water, Wind and Sky: Ian Coristine's Thousand Islands*. To purchase it, visit [1000islandsphotoart.com](http://1000islandsphotoart.com).

