

THE NARROWS An Interpretive Guide for Boaters



lake champlain water trail
an interpretive guide



Champ Sightings display board, Port Henry, NY

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Welcome

Lake Champlain lies at the heart of an inland water route running up the Hudson River from New York City and out the Richelieu River of Quebec to Montreal. The Abenaki Indians call the lake Bitawbagw "lake between;" the Mohawk call it Kanyatarakwá:ronte', "lake that is a gate to the country."

Native peoples have been using the lake for travel, fishing, and trade for millennia. European armies fought for control of the lake, and American laborers dug canals to carry the valley's raw materials to distant markets. America's first tourists came here to see the awesome landscape and breathe the fresh air.

The Narrows of Lake Champlain embraces all chapters of Lake Champlain's history. The impressive Palisades reveal the oldest rocks in the valley. Split Rock was an important Native place long before it played a part in international treaties.

Shipwrecks recall the time when everything moved by boat. Miles of shoreline have been set aside for the perpetual enjoyment of all. Use this guide to explore the special places and learn some of their stories.

While you explore, practice the "leave no trace" principle of outdoor recreation--never throw litter overboard and dispose of waste properly. Remember to clean your boat to prevent the spreading of aquatic nuisance species. A clean and healthy lake benefits everyone!

The guide begins and ends by Westport in Northwest Bay.

NEW YORK

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Cover: Foreground (Vermont) - Mouth of Otter Creek, Field Bay, Fort Pont Cassin Point, Porter Bay, the Narrows; distant shore (New York) - Split Rock Mountain Wild Forest, including Palisades, Adirondack Mountains beyond.

THE NARROWS

Map with Locations



- A**.... Public launch site, Westport, NY
- B**.... Furnace Point, NY
- C**.... Hunter Bay, NY
- D**.... Partridge Harbor, NY
- E**.... Rock Harbor, NY
- F**.... Barber Point & Lighthouse, NY
- G**.... Young Bay, NY
- H**.... Underwater Preserve, NY
- I**.... Barn Rock Harbor, NY
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- Q**.... Split Rock, NY
- R**.... Essex, NY
- S**.... Garden Island, Converse Bay, VT
- T**.... Thompson's Point, VT
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- Y**.... Button Bay State Park
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- AA**... Westport Yacht Club/
Le Bistro du Lac, NY
- BB**... Ballard Park Pavilion, NY
- CC**... Westport Marina, NY
- DD**... Northwest Bay, NY
- MM**.. Grog Harbor, NY
- UU**.. Porter Bay, VT
- XX**... Basin Harbor, VT
- YY**... Arnold Bay, VT
- ZZ**... Mullen Bay, NY

Northwest Bay: A Transition from Commerce to Recreation

Twenty years ago, gasoline barges entered the bay to off-load their cargo at a Mobil tank farm located adjacent to the present day State of New York public boat launch site. (A) Barges delivered gasoline, home heating oil and even jet fuel to ports along Lake Champlain until the mid-1980s, when trucks took over. Some older local residents miss hearing the “thump, thump, thump” sound of tugs slowly pushing barges down the lake.

Northwest Bay was even busier and noisier a century earlier during Lake Champlain’s “Iron Age” when two lakeside furnaces operated in Westport. The combination of high quality iron ore, plentiful timber and accessible water transportation made New York’s Champlain Valley the second highest producer of pig iron in the country for most of the 19th century.

The red-roofed building on Furnace Point (B) marks the site of the Sisco blast furnace, which operated from 1847 to 1895. This

furnace produced pig iron, bars of pure iron used in manufacturing.

Ore was transported here from distant Nichols Pond via an ingenious gravity-powered cart. A local charcoal kiln supplied fuel for the furnace. Smelted pig iron bars were loaded onto canal boats for passage down the Hudson River via the Champlain Canal, completed in 1823.

Years of smelting left the shoreline littered with a blue glasslike slag. Furnace Point now belongs to the Normandie Beach Club resort, previously known as Camp Normandie: since 1966 a French/English international summer camp, then a watercraft program until 2006.

A second furnace was located on what is, today, the Westport Yacht Club’s (AA) concrete dock. Known as a “puddling furnace,” the Norway Furnace converted pig iron to wrought iron for use by blacksmiths.



(A) Public Boat Launch, Westport, NY



(B) Furnace Point, NY

“The North Shore”

Leaving Northwest Bay and following the New York shoreline going north, several small harbors offer anchorage for cruising boaters, beginning with Hunter Bay (C). Well-sheltered Partridge Harbor (D), is a Lake Champlain “Hurricane Hole” arguably offering the best protection on the lake from winds of any direction. Further north, Rock Harbor (E) offers little protection, yet in 1790 a ferry operated from this scenic harbor across to Basin Harbor (XX) on the Vermont shore. Another ferry connected Barber Point, just south of Northwest Bay, (F) with Vermont’s Arnold Bay (YY).

In 1985 Vermont created Lake Champlain’s Underwater Historic Preserve program to protect shipwrecks while providing divers with reasonable access to sites. To prevent damage caused when anchoring, divers tie their boats to the large yellow buoys that mark shipwreck locations. Divers must register to dive on these sites at participating dive shops and marinas such as Westport Marina. Just north past Rock Harbor, a yellow bouy (H) marks New York State’s underwater preserve, established in 1998. The hull of the steamer, Champlain II, lies below the surface in 15 to 35 feet of water. The pilot, under the influence of morphine used to treat his gout, fell asleep at the wheel. The boat ran aground at full throttle, thrusting up onto the rocky shore. All of the passengers



(E) Rock Harbor, NY

were safe and climbed out onto the shore, but the boat eventually slid down and sank. After several name changes, the restaurant located at the Essex Shipyard Marina is once again called The Rudder Club for the huge rudder salvaged from the Champlain II which occupies a place of honor in the dining room.

Barn Rock Harbor: An Abandoned Quarry

Barn Rock Harbor (I), lacking wave protection only from the south, is a favorite of power boaters. The immense rock face at the entrance provides the name. Daredevils sometimes jump off the 75-foot cliff into the deep waters below. Shoreline depth ranges from 38 to 180 feet right along the edge.

On the left, inside the harbor is a pile of rubble, the remains of a dock (J) for a granite quarry. Large cut blocks can still be seen on the land above. The quarry brought granite down to the barges by carts on rails, using a pulley system of counterweights in the empty cart. On January 15, 1891, ice coated the cable, causing brakes to fail and the cart to crush and kill several workers, including members of the owner’s family. The quarry closed. A sunken barge still remains beneath the harbor.



(I) Barn Rock Harbor, NY

Split Rock Mountain Wild Forest

Between Barn Rock and Split Rock runs the most pristine and dramatic stretch of shoreline on the lake.

Just north of Barn Rock magnificent cliffs known as the Palisades (K) rise 100 feet above the lake and plunge another 140 feet beneath the water's surface. The sheer cliffs are mottled with indigenous gray curly lichen, which has been growing for well over 100 years. Swallows nest in the lower crevices along the rock wall. Stains caused by rain leaching lime out of the granite streak the rock face. The top of the Palisades is a nesting ground for turkey vultures, American bald eagles, osprey and peregrine falcons.

Continuing north, Snake Den Harbor (L) is home to the eastern rattlesnake, also known as the timber rattler. During the 19th century, canal boats under tow would occasionally seek shelter from the wind in this large bay. Bald eagles frequently roost along the mountain ridge.

In the next bay, Ore Bed Harbor (M), rock slides cascade down to the water's edge. The dramatic flows of broken granite are actually talus left from mining magnetite iron ore in the 1860s. A mining village with houses and a store were situated on top of the mountain, and a long wooden stairway reached down to the lake. Archaeological remains from the days of the mining operation still exist on land and underwater.



(K) Palisades, NY

From 1901 to 1902 above Grog Harbor (MM) a graphite mine flourished briefly before the mineral vein was depleted.

Today this land is part of the Split Rock Mountain Wild Forest wilderness area owned by New York State.

Split Rock: Marking the Narrows

Split Rock (Q) marks the northern end of “The Narrows.” Look for the geological namesake—a sheer cleft in the granite formation extending between the mainland and the spit of land jutting out into Whallon Bay. This rock, known to the Abenaki as *zôbapská*, or “the rock split through,” lies directly opposite Thompson’s Point. It is part of an island called *sizikwáimenahán*, “rattlesnake island” or “picture rock,” so named for the profusion of snakes and the presence of a natural image resembling a snake on the island. Abenaki, Mohawk, and Mohican people have long traveled this part of the lake, but conflicts between Native communities in the 1600s led Europeans to assume that Split Rock was a boundary between Native peoples in the Saint Lawrence and Mohawk Valleys.

The 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, which marked the end of Queen Anne’s War, proclaimed that Split Rock separated New France and New England.

At the very end of Split Rock Mountain are two lights (P). The original light tower was built in 1838 on a location chosen by Congressman Reuben Whallon, for whom the adjacent bay is named. A 39-foot octagonal tower of rough-hewn blue limestone replaced the original tower in 1867. Located 100 feet above the lake, the light was visible 18 miles away. The lighthouse was decommissioned in 1928. The property was sold and converted into a private home, which it remains today. For more than 70 years, the automated replacement beacon mounted atop a steel skeleton structure guided boats at night. In 2002, as part of a movement to restore historic lighthouses on the lake, the stone tower light was renovated and re-lit by the U.S. Coast Guard.



(Q) Split Rock, NY



(P) Split Rock lighthouses, NY

The Broad Lake, State Boundaries, & Fishing

North of Whallon Bay lies the historic hamlet of Essex, New York (R). On a clear day, the Four Brothers Islands are visible in the center of the lake. These islands are off limits to people and are maintained as bird sanctuaries. Also to the north is the lake's deepest point—420 feet! These depths make Whallon Bay one of the coldest places for swimming. It also makes it a favorite spot for fishermen looking for lake trout.

Technically, the deepest part of the lake determines the border between New York and Vermont. That puts the border almost on the New York shore through this section of the lake. The border once posed a problem for anglers with a New York or Vermont fishing license. After many years of public pressure, the states began issuing reciprocal fishing licenses that permit fishing on either side of the lake, with the exception of a few bays. With over 435 square miles of surface water and 587 miles of shoreline, Lake Champlain is home to over 80 species of fish, 20 of which are actively sought by anglers. Favorites include lake trout, brown trout, steelhead trout, Atlantic landlocked salmon, yellow perch, large and smallmouth bass, northern pike, walleye and smelt. The lake hosts several fishing tournaments throughout the year.



*Travis Jeffords with 15.5 lb lake trout caught near Split Rock.
John Gereau, photographer*

An Ancient Waterway

Native oral traditions attribute the formation of the lake to the work of a giant earthshaper who, over time, carved out the valley, pushed up mountain ranges, and filled the region with water.

Geologists have determined that the rock of the Adirondack Mountains formed 1.9 billion years ago, and Vermont's younger Green Mountains formed 400 million years ago. After the last glaciation peaked about 200,000 years ago, the melting glacier filled the valley with water, forming glacial "Lake Vermont," which reached an elevation of 600 feet. As the glacier retreated northward, an outlet formed near Fort Ann, New York, draining the glacial lake to an elevation of 470 feet. Gradually the lake level lowered until it connected with the St. Lawrence low lands. Sea water flowed in, creating the "Champlain Sea," drawing in marine mammals and fish that provided an abundant food supply for Native peoples. Over the next 2000 years, the earth gradually rose until the marine water was permanently closed off about 10,000 years ago, resulting today's freshwater lake.

The sixth great lake measures 120 miles long and 12 miles at its widest point near Port Kent, New York. "The narrows" are only one mile wide. Located about 95 feet above sea level, Lake Champlain

flows north, emptying into the Richelieu River, which flows into the St. Lawrence River, and on to the Atlantic Ocean.

Along the shoreline, a white band indicates where ice etches the rocks as it expands during the spring ice-out. Over a year's time, the lake level varies as much as eight feet, depending upon snow, snow melt, rain, sun and wind. In winter, if there is no wind when the lake freezes, smooth, clear, black ice forms. The bottom is visible to a depth of 12 feet.

Indigenous peoples led European explorers to the lake during the colonial era. In 1609, Mohican people guided Henry Hudson up the *Mahicannituk*, "Mohican river," later renamed for Hudson.

In June of 1609, a party of 60 Algonquin, Huron and Montagnais Indians brought Frenchman Samuel de Champlain down the lake to help them make war on the Mohawk. The introduction of European guns changed the nature of inter-tribal warfare, and the visit from Champlain led to a change in the name of the lake itself.

Vermont: Thompson's Point and Kingsland Bay

New York's dramatic mountains plunging into the lake contrast sharply with the long points and complex bays of the Vermont coastline of "the narrows." Across from Split Rock is Garden Island (S) in Converse Bay and Thompson's Point, (T) Vermont.

Thompson's Point is known to the Abenaki as *kwazôwáapskák*, or "the place at the extended rock." In ancient times, Abenaki artisans produced distinctive clay pottery at this site. During the 1800s, the Obomsawin family who lived at this site made distinctive Abenaki ash-splint baskets for sale to tourists; their descendants are still important Abenaki artisans and historians today.

A 100-foot-deep underwater crevasse off the point is a popular site for scuba divers swimming among the many species of fish that populate the area. Directly one-and-a-half miles south of the point is Kingsland Bay (V). The Vermont state park at this sheltered bay was an exclusive girls' camp until the late 1960s.

Hidden by the trees on a point just south of Kingsland Bay is the Keiser estate (U). Purchased by the David and Sylvia Keiser in 1970 as a summer home, this spectacular property once included a golf



(U) Keiser Estate, VT

course. The concrete pillar in the water once supported a bridge for golfers. David Keiser's business interests were in sugar production in pre-Castro Cuba.

Diamond Island, Beacon of the Narrows

West of Vermont's Porter Bay (UU) and the Fort Cassin site (O), Diamond Island (N) appears roughly midway between the New York and Vermont shores. The Diamond Island Beacon helps mariners navigate "the narrows" by night. Lighthouses at Split Rock to the north and Barber Point to the south provide subsequent navigational bearings. In recent years, the island was purchased from the State of Vermont, and the new landowner has built a camp there.

Yellow dive buoys near Diamond Island indicate the location of two shipwrecks in Vermont's system of underwater preserves. The buoy closest to the island marks The Diamond Island *Stone Boat*, a submerged canal boat still loaded with large stone blocks. Today, much of the ship is encrusted with zebra mussels. The buoy located south of the island marks the schooner, *Water Witch*, one of Lake Champlain's most important shipwrecks. Built as a steamboat in 1832 in Fort Cassin (O) at the mouth of Otter Creek, it was converted from steam to sail in 1836. The *Water Witch* served for 30 years as a freight carrier until April of 1866, when, loaded with Port Henry iron ore, it sank in an early season gale. Captain Thomas Mock and his family were thrown into the icy water. Essex Captain Edward Eaton saved all but one child, Rosa, who was lost.



(N) Diamond Island, VT

Otter Creek and Fort Cassin

Otter Creek, known to the Abenaki as *wnegigwtegwiz*, “little river of otters,” is a twisting river, flowing past farmlands, campgrounds, and a few small marinas. Rocky shallows and picturesque waterfalls prevent boat traffic beyond the Vergennes basin.

East of Diamond Island, at the mouth of Otter Creek, is the site of Fort Cassin (O), built during the War of 1812. The American battery of seven cannon was built to protect Commodore Thomas MacDonough’s temporary shipyard eight miles upstream at Otter Creek Falls in Vergennes. The British attempted to blockade the creek on May 14, 1814, but realizing they lacked the men to fight on land, they retreated in less than two hours. MacDonough took his fleet north to decisively defeat the British in the pivotal Battle of Plattsburgh Bay in September 1814. No trace of the Fort remains.

Ethan Allen, the Revolutionary War leader of Vermont’s Green Mountain Boys who captured Fort Ticonderoga, suggested the town be named for the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Vergennes, who helped colonists during the American Revolution and negotiated the 1783 Treaty of Paris. The quaint town, established in 1788, prides itself on being “The smallest city in the USA.”



(O) Fort Cassin site, VT

Vergennes was also the home of Captain Philomena Dominique D’Ostiguy Daniels, the world’s first woman steamboat captain.

When her husband, a steamboat captain, died, this short, peppery woman, famous for her big Victorian hats, continued the family’s business, captaining regular trips to Westport aboard the *Victor* and the *Water Lilly*. She lived from 1843 to 1929.

Replica Gunboat *Philadelphia*

Many “camps” and summer homes dot the shore on the way to the Basin Harbor Resort. In the North Harbor, the replica Revolutionary War gunboat, *Philadelphia* (X) is anchored at the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum. The original *Philadelphia* was part of a fleet commanded by Benedict Arnold at the Battle of Valcour Island on October 11, 1776. Thirty British warships with 700 seamen followed by 7,000 troops in 400 bateaux left Cumberland Head, north of Plattsburgh, with the goal of capturing strategic Lake Champlain and continuing into the Hudson Valley, thus dividing the colonies.

Arnold had a smaller fleet that included four boats captured from the British, 12 gunboats and row-galleys quickly built in Whitehall. Knowing of the enemy’s advance, he formed a tight line south of Plattsburgh between Valcour Island and the New York shore. After a brutal six-hour battle, Arnold quietly escaped under the veil of night with his remaining boats.

The British overcame the American fleet two days later just below Split Rock. Arnold engaged the British in a running gun battle. Realizing that his battered fleet couldn’t win, he ordered the vessels beached and blown up. Four gunboats and his flagship row galley, *Congress*, were destroyed and abandoned in Ferris Bay,



Philadelphia replica under sail

known today as Arnold Bay (YY) south of here. After burning the boats, he escaped on foot with the Ferris family and 200 men to Fort Ticonderoga. This tale is told in the classic historical novel, *Rabble In Arms*, by Kenneth Roberts.

The *Philadelphia*, sunk in the engagement, was raised from the waters of Valcour Bay in 1935. Exhibited lakeside until the early 1960’s, she was transported to Washington, DC to be displayed at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

Basin Harbor Resort and Lake Champlain Maritime Museum

The campus of the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum (LCMM) at Basin Harbor (XX) interprets maritime history and nautical archeology. Visitors learn about Lake Champlain and its commerce from exhibits, interactive learning stations, and audio-video programs. The campus also houses the world-renowned Marine Research Institute, which was created in 2000 for study of the underwater archaeological cultural resources, conservation of artifacts, historical research and outreach.

The Lake Champlain Maritime Museum recently constructed a full-size replica sailing-canal schooner, the *Lois McClure*, at its shipyard in Burlington. Designed using measurements taken from 1862-class canal boats, the *Lois McClure* has become a floating museum. In 2005, the schooner visited New York City via the Champlain Canal and Hudson River—retracing the route of many canal boats before her.

The Basin Harbor Club occupies the same stretch of forested, rocky shoreline as the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum. The privately-owned, 700-acre resort is surrounded by beautiful gardens with two excellent restaurants, a grass air field, tennis courts, canoe



(XX) Basin Harbor, VT

and Sunfish rentals, a swimming beach and an 18-hole golf course. Four generations of the Beach family have operated this resort for more than 100 years. Between April and October, both families and corporate guests stay in cottages to relax or attend programs and conferences.

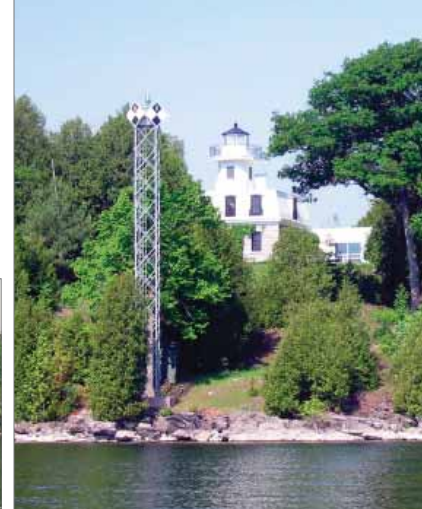
Looking South Up the Lake

South of Basin Harbor, vaguely discernable protruding from the lake's surface, is a low dark rock known as the "Scotch Bonnet." Private homes extend along the shoreline to Button Point and the tip of Button Bay State Park (Y). Look for adjacent Arnold Bay (YY) when turning to cross the lake back to Westport, New York.

Barber Point occupies the southernmost edge of Northwest Bay. Westport's first permanent settler, Major Hezekiah Barber, homesteaded there in 1785 when he arrived from Connecticut. Nearby, his descendents still own and operate the Barber Homestead RV Park. In 1873, Barber Point lighthouse (F) was built with an integrated tower and a fixed light. Standing 83 feet above the lake and visible for 14 miles, the beacon marked a crucial navigational point for northbound boats, indicating a turn to starboard, up through the narrows to the Diamond Island beacon. In 1935, an automated light on a steel skeleton replaced the stone Barber Point lighthouse, but the handsome stone structure remains and is in use as a private home.

Camp Dudley (Z), the nation's oldest boys' camp, is located in Cole Bay, just south of Barber Point and Young's Bay (G). Ten- to fifteen-year-old boys from across the country and around the world

Right: (F) Barber Point Lighthouse;
Below: (Z) Camp Dudley



have enjoyed sports, hiking, boating, swimming, music, art, drama, and a rich non-denominational spiritual life there since 1885. Affiliated with the YMCA, the camp motto is "The other fellow first." Each camper's loyalty and enthusiasm endures well into adulthood. Reunions are frequent and well attended.

The Great Serpent

A number of oral traditions around the world refer to the survival of giant creatures and water monsters from the ancient past. Loch Ness has a legend of a huge underwater creature in its “Nessie;” the modern-day residents of Lake Champlain have nicknamed the local version of this creature “Champ.”

A great mystery, there are reports of this creature having been seen in the lake by residents and visitors for centuries. Native folklore tells us that the Iroquois referred to this beast as the “Great Horned Serpent.”

Samuel de Champlain’s 1609 journals provide us with the first written documentation of the presence of some kind of large creature in Lake Champlain: “a swimmer about 20 feet long, thick as a barrel, that resembles a serpent with tough skin, in which a man’s knife cannot penetrate, with the head (like a horse) having a snout like that of a boar.” He had “teeth that could spear a man.” Champ’s size, sightings in the shallows and an apparent preference for swimming along the water’s surface led Champlain to conclude that Champ must be a carnivore.

The Native people who have long traveled the lake believe that it is extremely dangerous to provoke or disrespect any of the lake’s aquatic inhabitants, real or supernatural, lest one be drowned.

“Champ Visits the Split Rock Lighthouse”, an illustration by cartoonist Sid Couchey of Essex, NY.



Today’s Champ Quest

In 1977, Sandra Mansi photographed Champ near St. Albans, Vermont. The creature’s six-foot neck rose up out of water. She estimated the body was 12 to 15 feet long. Finally, after four years of wondering whether or not anyone would believe her, she published the photo in the New York Times.

Joe Zarzynski, a teacher of 7th-grade American history from Saratoga Springs, NY, tracked Champ for twenty summers between 1975 and 1995, doing his best work in the late 80s with side-scan sonar and an underwater robot. He showed slides of his work at Westport Marina. He wrote *Champ: Beyond the Legend*, now out of print.

Some believe that Champ is a cousin of the ancient dinosaurs. Others think it could be a relative of Scotland’s Loch Ness Monster. Another theory is that Champ is a sturgeon, a large scaly fish, or perhaps even a giant lake otter. But despite broad and often quite imaginative speculation, nobody really agrees upon what Champ is.

Joe Zarzynski believes Champ may be a plesiosaur, a prehistoric marine reptile with flippers, a long neck and small head that lived 65 million years ago. Some sources describe sharp teeth for eating

fish. However the cumbersome size and horse-like head, with eyes on opposing sides rather than forward looking, would make it ill-equipped as a predator. Furthermore, fossils found in England and Germany suggest that plesiosaurs were vegetarians.

Middlebury College geologist, Dr. Patricia Manley, is adamant [that] there is NO Champ. She argues that the age of the lake, 10,000 versus 65 million years old (when plesiosaur existed), renders the existence of a prehistoric Champ totally impossible.

In the mid 1990s, a Japanese TV crew came to Lake Champlain to conduct a filmed documentary search for Champ. Big fans of monsters (evidence Godzilla of movie fame), the Japanese spared nothing in mounting what was the most ambitious exploration to date. They asked Westport Marina’s Jim Carroll to organize a flotilla of 14 boats that were then outfitted with sonar and cameramen. They patrolled the lake in a chevron formation, hoping to capture the image of Champ. A well-known Japanese movie star narrated their two-hour program, but they never did succeed in capturing images of the elusive creature.

Personal Encounters with Champ

Over the years, two types of sightings have emerged: a Champ with head and neck, or a Champ with just one or two humps. The hump-only version is more likely during cocktail hour. In Mullen Bay (ZZ), south of Westport, frequent Champ sightings have led people to conclude that he may be 20 feet long.

The Carroll family (owners and operators of the Westport Marina since 1982) and friends have had direct experiences with Champ. When Jim Carroll was about 14 years old, he was out water skiing with three friends on a flat calm day. As he looked out of the boat, he saw a large something swimming beside the boat. The boat driver stopped, and he and Jim called to their friend in the water, “Get out! Climb back in the boat!” They hurried back to the dock.

When a family friend was five, she was playing along the shore in Mullen Bay. She ran up to the house and told her mom, “A horse just swam up to me!” Her mom disregarded her comments and sent her back out to play. When the Japanese crew was here, she remembered the incident. Was the “horse” really Champ?

On another occasion Jim and his wife Gigi were returning from Essex slowly by boat on a warm, balmy night, with thin clouds filtering the light from the moon. Halfway along the north shore of Northwest Bay, Gigi pointed ahead at something in the water. Jim spun the wheel to avoid it, thinking it might be a floating log or tree. Surprise! The “log” swam away from the boat. Curious, Jim turned the boat to follow. Just as his 28-foot boat reached the spot where the creature was, it dove under the boat and came up on the other side. Comparing Champ’s length to his boat, Jim estimates that the creature is about 20 feet long.

In 1982, the Vermont House of Representatives passed legislation protecting Champ “from any willful act resulting in death, injury, or harassment.” The next year the New York State Assembly and Senate passed a bill protecting Champ against death, injury or harassment, and “encouraging report of sighting of such animals.”

Transportation in Transition

Lake Champlain has been a water highway for more than 10,000 years. The ease of travel on the lake in summer and winter, along with an abundant food supply, made the lake a strategically important transportation corridor, trading place, fishing zone, and habitation site for Native peoples. Colonial British and French settlers were drawn to the lake for the same reasons. Birchbark canoes, log rafts, rowboats, warships, steamboats, horse-powered ferries, bateaux, sloops, sailing canal boats, schooners, sail ferries, and steam launches are all part of the lake’s well-traveled history.

Lake Champlain and its shoreline communities, such as Westport, played a significant role in regional transportation until about World War II. In the 1800s, Westport served as the Adirondack region’s connection to Lake Champlain, with stagecoach service to Elizabethtown and beyond.

American families living on sailing canal boats carried household staples, produce, and news around the lake. After 1823, pig iron was carted down the Champlain canal. For 100 years, the Westport

dock served commercial traffic. Native American Indian families continued to travel the lake, for fishing, hunting, visiting, and the tourist trade.

Lake traffic evolved to include excursions for more affluent travelers when trains came to Westport in 1875. The steamboat *Ticonderoga* used to stop at the Westport docks regularly between 1907 and 1917 on its route up and down the lake, carrying passengers and freight. With the advent of motor travel, the *Ticonderoga* carried automobiles and served as a ferry as well. In 1924, the ferry operation was moved from Westport to Port Kent, dramatically increasing the number of cars it carried. Senior citizens can still recall their excursions on the *Ticonderoga* or her sister ship, *Vermont III*. By the 1930s, recreational boating became the dominant activity on the lake. The *Ticonderoga* continued service on the lake until 1953, when she was hauled overland to the Shelburne Museum in Vermont where she has been restored to her 1923 condition.

Westport Then and Now

Facing the Westport Marina, the building to the left with matched gable ends (CC) is the former Westport Yacht Club (AA). In its heyday in the 1920s and 30s it was one of the most exclusive yacht clubs in the country due to the presence of the DuPont family. Over the years it served as a private residence and is now a public restaurant.

The beautiful park on the hillside between the Yacht Club and the Westport Marina is Ballard Park, once the grounds of the prestigious Westport Inn, a resort rivaling the Basin Harbor Club. A boathouse sat between the marina and the swimming beach; its dock is still used for tenders to anchored boats as well as sunbathers. The Ballard Park Pavilion (BB), where concerts and theatre performances are held during the summer months, was designed to recall the architecture of the earlier Westport Inn boathouse.

Crowned by the beautiful Adirondack Mountains, the lakeside village of Westport, formerly named Bessboro after Elizabeth, daughter of founder William Gilliland, was developed on a land grant from King George III of England. Had Gilliland sided with the colonists during the Revolution, the town might still retain the name. The French called Westport *Baies des Rocher Fendus* or Bay of the Split Rock because it was the first big bay the French would have approached after passing Split Rock. On the other hand, the English, sailing from their stronghold in Crown Point, called this town Northwest Bay (DD). In 1815, the name Westport was adopted reflecting the importance of the lake to its residents. Westport, where Lake Champlain meets the Adirondack Mountains, was once a connection for steamers to stagecoaches, and now, from pleasure craft to Amtrak, or from rental car to the bus or an airport.



(AA) Westport Yacht Club: Le Bistro du Lac



(AA) Westport Marina with Lois McClure, a replica of an 1862-class canal schooner, built by the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum, and the tug Churchill

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Westport, NY, Dock House, post card, circa 1910

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