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NATION/WORLD

## YOU HAVEN'T LIVED HERE UNTIL ...: You've visited the Soo Locks

June 11, 2006

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**What they are:** They're a system of gates and canals on the St. Mary's River at Sault Ste. Marie. Like a water elevator, they raise and lower water about 21 feet so ships can move from the higher level of Lake Superior to the lower level of the other lakes.



zoom

The MacArthur Lock, opened in 1943, connects Lake Superior, left, and Lake Huron, right. (2005 photo by ROMAIN BLANQUART/Detroit Free Press)

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**Why you should see them:**

Because the ships are huge, fly flags from all over the world and show why the lakes are crucial to the global economy. Ships make about 12,000 lock passages a year, carrying cargo like iron ore, limestone, coal, grain, cement, salt and sand.

**Why kids will like them:** Because the ships are cool! They'll see every kind of vessel, from small boats to 1,000-foot lakers. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which run the locks, says they're the only place in the region where you can see ships that big.

**History:** The Northwest Fur Co. built the first lock there in 1797. It was destroyed during the War of 1812. In the 1850s, new locks were built for just under \$1 million. Since then, new locks have been built and the channels deepened to accommodate bigger ships.

**To visit:** You can see the locks anytime, but they're closed to boat traffic Jan. 15-March 25. The last Friday of June -- June 30 this year -- visitors can get close to the ships. Admission is free. For more information, go to [www.soolocksvisitorscenter.com](http://www.soolocksvisitorscenter.com).



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