



**The Iroquois dam spans 603 metres across the St. Lawrence controlling water flow with 32 sluiceway gates.**

**Image credit: Robert Erickson**

# IROQUOIS POINT, Home to Lock #7 of the St. Lawrence Seaway

By Lisa Crandall

**T**he shortest of the locks along the St. Lawrence Seaway is situated at Iroquois Point, near the village of Iroquois. At just 0.3 kilometres long, the primary function of this lock is to carry cargo vessels around the adjacent dam spanning the width of the river between Rockway Point on the American side and Iroquois Point.

Rivers, large and small, were the original method of long distance travel long before Canada became a settled nation, or international commerce became the daily routine. The St. Lawrence River was and continues to be, the backbone of a liquid highway, sometimes referred to as HwyH2O. This lengthy waterway starts at the Atlantic Ocean, east of Montreal and opens the way to the interior of Canada by way of the Great Lakes. From Montreal Harbour to Thunder Bay, one of the most westerly ports on Lake Superior, is 1,222 nautical miles. Travel time is 119 sailing hours with 17 hours spent in locks that raise a ship a height of 600 feet, the equivalent of a 60-storey building, as it travels inland.

*To give you an idea of how long boats can be traveling between destinations, traveling from Montreal Harbour to Toronto takes 34 sailing hours with 5 hours spent in locks. A distance of 348 nautical miles.*

Originally riddled with rapids and sections too shallow for modern cargo vessels, in the 1950's, the 306 kilometre stretch of the St. Lawrence River, between Montreal and Lake Ontario, was significantly altered with an eye to making it more amenable to ocean going cargo vessels. Officially opened in 1959 by Queen Elizabeth II and American President Dwight D. Eisenhower, it is acknowledged as being one of the most complicated engineering projects in history. It was a massive endeavour requiring Canadian and American cooperation and benefiting ports on both sides of the border. It involved the creation of and improvements to 7 locks and 3 dams (1 dam for producing hydroelectric power and the other 2 dams to help control the flow of water) all as one huge undertaking. At one point, there were 4 cofferdams (temporary dams) in place that reduced and redirected the flow of the river entirely to allow for construction. The project also involved the relocation of several small towns and the subsequent flooding of many farmsteads and homes that dated back to the founding of Canada. For details of this piece of Canadian history visit the Lost Villages Website at [www.ghosttownpix.com/lostvillages](http://www.ghosttownpix.com/lostvillages) Iroquois is one of those villages that was entirely relocated.

According to government statistics, transporting goods via water is the most-

eco-friendly way to move cargo. One ship carrying 30,000 tonnes of grain is the equivalent of 300 railway cars or 1,150 semi-trailer loads. This results in 7.5 times LESS greenhouse gas emissions per unit of cargo moved by road. A ship can move one ton of freight 800 kilometres using only 4 litres of fuel, removing the equivalent of 870 trucks from the roads.

*In 2017 the Montreal/Lake Ontario section of the Seaway established a new record, remaining open from March 20 to January 11, a total of 298 days.*

The ships using the seaway fall into three different categories - "Canadian Lakers" - Canadian domestic carriers operating between Canadian ports on the system, "U.S. Lakers" - domestic carriers transporting cargo between ports on the American side of the system, and "Salties" - ocean-going vessels which operate between the Canadian and American ports as well as to overseas destinations.



**Image Credit: Lisa Crandall**

**The Iroquois Lock was created by severing Point Iroquois from the mainland.**

The locks at Iroquois Point consist of a narrow channel of water with gates at both ends that allow large ships to bypass the Iroquois Dam, whose purpose is to help control the flow of water between Lake Ontario and Montreal Harbour. The Iroquois

Locks can handle boats that are 225.6 metres long (740 feet) and 23.8 metres wide (78 feet). Many locks function as a way to lift (or lower) boats significant heights, although in Iroquois it is a difference of only six feet. Smaller private boats often avoid the locks by slipping through the open gates of the dam. The gates are very seldom all down, as that would impede the natural flow of the water as it streams eastward to the Moses-Sanders Power Dam at Cornwall, 40 kilometres (25 miles) downstream. In recent years the gates have also been instrumental in easing seasonal flooding as far downstream as Montreal.

Transit time at this lock is often a matter of minutes. That combined with easy parking, a convenient snack bar, the "Lockview Ice Cream Parlour and Gift Shop", where you can enjoy an ice cream cone, (soft or hard) grab a coffee or have a cold drink, makes the lock a popular place for visitors and locals on a sunny summer afternoon. Adjacent to the lock is Iroquois Point Park; a large green space with convenient picnic tables that the local community uses for large events, such as Canada Day celebrations, Golden Gears Classic Car Rallies, and the Galop Canal Bluegrass Festival.

Since 2010, the locks have also been home to a family of Osprey. Their nest is located atop a 10 metre pole at the west end of the locks. During the spring and early summer, a nearby observation point is often occupied by enthusiastic birders and their cameras, hoping to catch a glimpse of the young birds or their parents.

The nearby village of Iroquois is one of these that was relocated to accommodate the reshaping of the St. Lawrence River and the subsequent flooding that created the seaway and Lake St. Lawrence in the late 1950's. Despite that upheaval, there are still a few historic sites to be found, including a historical home and museum known as Carman House and The Iroquois Point Cemetery (established in 1797). There is a local marina for boat travellers, who wish to pause and explore the area, as well as a small local air strip, for those who prefer to travel by air, rather than river or road.

If you are looking to do some ship watching this summer there is an interactive map online that indicates where the ships are along the seaway route, giving you time to get to the Locks for a close-up view as they pass by.

➔ To view this map, go to [www.greatlakes-seaway.com/en/navigating/map](http://www.greatlakes-seaway.com/en/navigating/map)

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Image Credit: Lisa Crandall

**Nesting atop a 10 metre tower near the edge of the lock gives a local family of Osprey a front row seat to passing ships.**



Image Credit: Robert Erickson

**Steel gates control the water as ships pass through the lock.**



Image Credit: Lisa Crandall