

# The geography of the Chequamegon Bay -3 171

From the far northeastern end of the Bayfield peninsula, the coast consists mainly of sandstone cliffs, heavily sculpted by wave action and overlain by clay.

Beginning at Red Cliff the peninsula highland presses close to the coast, and just northeast of Bayfield the rock cliff with its overburden of clay rises to over one hundred feet above the water, while Bayfield itself is built on the steeply

sloped flank of the highland, which extends to a low clay bank at the water's edge. Beyond Bayfield the sandstone cliffs reappear and

continue toward the southwest, giving way just short of Onion River to high clay banks. Southwest of Onion River there is an extensive wetland formed by that river and the Sioux River farther to southwest. Beyond this wetland there are clay banks and then sandstone cliffs emerge again to form a prominent headland, Houghton Point. Here the highland recedes somewhat from the coast, creating a gradually sloped area, broad behind Houghton Point, but narrowing where the highland intrudes back to the

east farther to the southwest. The coast then continues with sandstone cliffs ten or more feet in

height until replaced once again by high clay cliffs, with lower banks and ledges of sandstone.

At the city of Washburn, located along a



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lowland strip and up the face of the peninsula highland, the coast forms a wide bay, Vanderverter Bay, with low clay cliffs and narrow beaches replaced at its southwest margin by a small marsh where Thompson's Creek enters the bay. In the shallow water along the shore there is a belt of boulders carried in by the glacier that have accumulated as the clay banks have been eroded back by the lake. Beyond Thompson's Creek the coast is characterized by clay banks of varying heights with sandstone banks or ledges at their bases.

At Bonus Creek the highland recedes from the coast forming a broad lowland

formed by Whittlesey and Fish Creeks at the head of the bay. At the head of the bay the coast curves around from the southwest to the northeast, the Fish Creek wetland giving way to a broad sand beach, then to clay cliffs ten or more feet

high, which front the site of Ashland on the southern lowland. Farther along the coast the clay cliffs give way to a slough at the base of Chequamegon Point. Here the trend of the coast turns from northeast to southeast and is characterized by moderately high clay banks with underlying ledges of sandstone. From Marble Point to the mouth of the Montreal River sandstone bluffs once again predominate.

The entrance to Chequamegon Bay is guarded by the Apostles Islands archipelago. Originally thought to include only 12 islands (hence the name), there are actually 22 islands. The largest island is Madeline, 15,359.5 acres and the smallest is Gull, 3.5 acres; total number of acres of the 22 islands is 54,464. An early proposal was to name the islands after states and call the group the "federation islands," but only two have state names, (New) York and Michigan. Madeline Island was named after the DAUGHTER OF WHITE

Crane, Chief of the Chippewa at La Pointe. The names of the other islands reflect geographic features or local traditions.

The Bayfield peninsula highland was created by the Wisconsin glacier as it retreated 10,000 years ago, depositing on the underlying ancient sandstone, as high as 600 feet, a mix of sand, clay, gravel, and rocks

scooped up as it advanced from the spreading center near Hudson Bay. Lake Duluth was a large lake of meltwater that formed in front of the Wisconsin glacier as it retreated about 10,000 years ago. The lake laid down a thick mantle of red clay over the Bayfield peninsula and Ashland plain. The peninsula is capped by the barrens, a roughly oval shaped region of hilly sand soils and potholes, bounded by the clay deposits laid down by Lake Duluth. The average water level in Chequamegon Bay is about 600 feet above sea level. Elevations in the heavily furrowed northeastern end of the Bayfield peninsula range up to 1,435 feet above sea level, or about 835 feet above the bay water level.

The highland around the bay is drained by at least 14 rivers and creeks between Chequamegon Bay and Port Wing. The largest of these are Fish Creek, which flows northeast, into a slough that drains into the head of the bay, just within the eastern boundary of Bayfield County; the Sioux River, formed by the Big Sioux and Little Sioux Rivers, which flows eastward into a marsh that drains into the bay, between Washburn and Bayfield; and the Bad River, which flows northward into Lake Superior at the base of Chequamegon Point.