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# The Great Lakes

Thanks to a system of interconnecting natural waterways, channels, and locks, ships are able to navigate 2,342 miles all the way from the Atlantic Ocean to Duluth, MN via the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Seaway. At an average sailing speed of 12 mph it takes about 8.5 days to sail from one end to the other.

Together Lakes Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie, and Ontario contain about 21% of the earth's total supply of fresh water. Only Russia's Lake Baikal can boast a larger volume.

The state of Michigan actually ranks ninth among US states in total miles of shoreline – pretty impressive considering it lies hundreds of miles from the nearest ocean.

The Great Lakes basins were dug by glaciers – specifically the Laurentide Ice Sheet - during the Last Glacial Period. Melt-water from the receding ice filled them up some 10-12,000 years ago. A small remnant of this once massive glacier, Canada's Barnes Ice Cap, had been stable for the last 2,000 years but began melting at an alarming rate during the 1960s. It is expected to disappear entirely sometime within the next 300 years. Why do you suppose this is happening at this particular time in the area's long history?



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