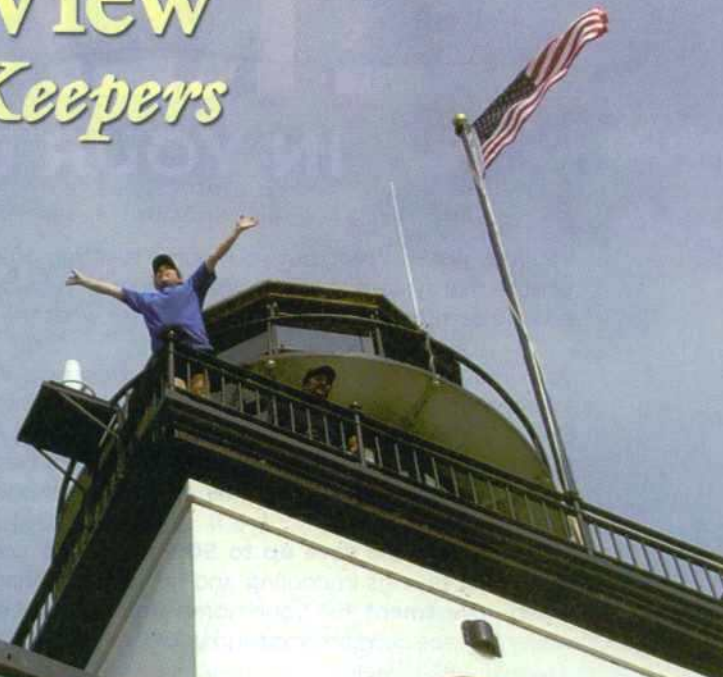


# MICHIGAN *Country Lines*

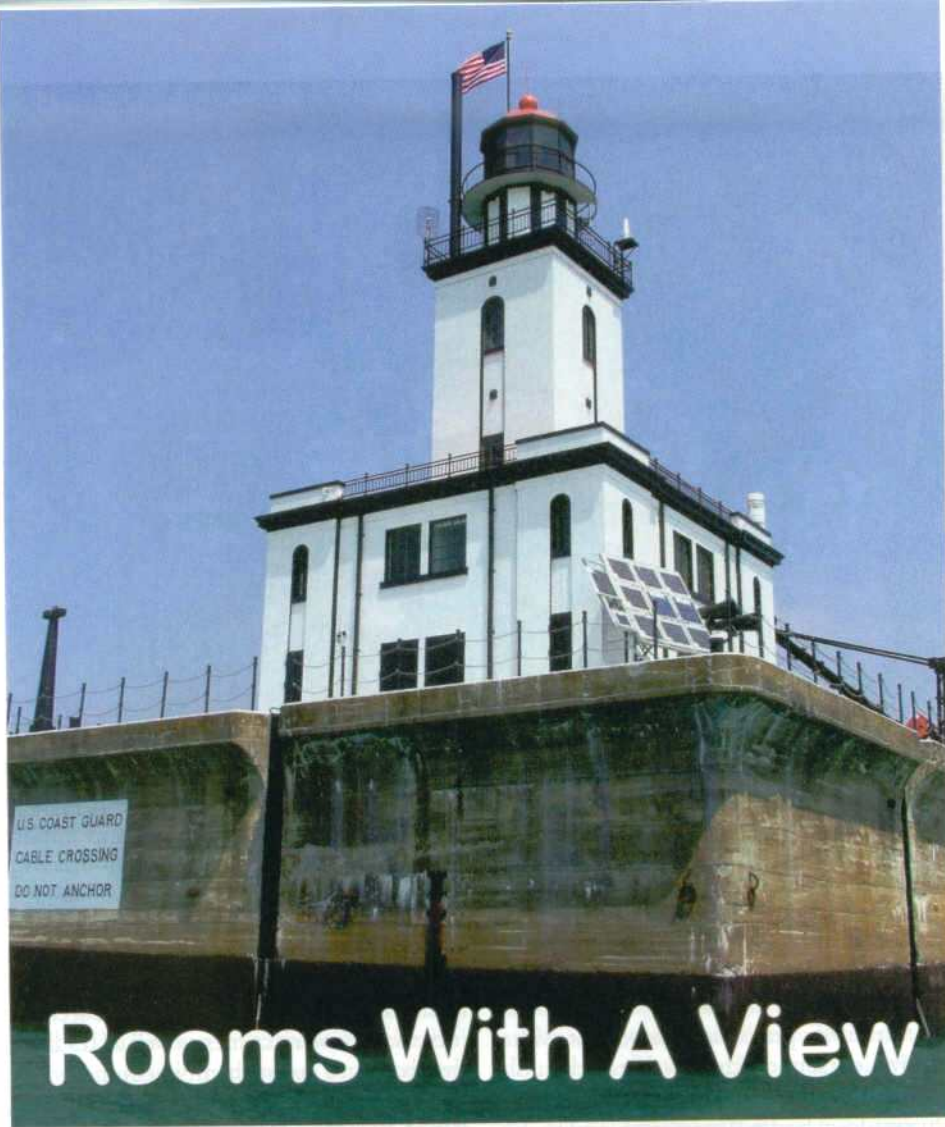
**Rooms With A View**  
*Guest Lighthouse Keepers*

**Plus: Meth's  
Rural Menace**



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# Rooms With A View

We spent a weekend on DeTour Reef Light Station. **Cindy Zuker**

**M**UCH LIKE GULLS, we usually stood on the deck facing the same way. But our backs were to the wind instead of facing it. And we were there to take in the spectacular view, not just roost for the night. Though we did that, too.

We were guest lighthouse keepers for a whole weekend on DeTour Reef Light in the mouth of the St. Mary's River at the north end of Lake Huron. Standing

alone a mile off shore, this guiding light of safe passage rises 83 feet above the water and is visible for 18 miles, marking the way for ships and boats traveling to and from Lake Superior.

Paired up with a couple we had never met before, my husband Dan and I became fast friends with Todd and Sheri Stepien of Pembine, WI. We had been accepted to be "guest keepers" through a program designed by the DeTour Reef Light Preservation

Society (DRLPS) to bring awareness to this historic Great Lakes treasure and give us the ultimate lighthouse experience. Indeed, it was.



Meeting at the Drummond Island Historical Museum on Friday afternoon, we received a welcome and brief history from DRLPS director and president Dave Bardsley before embarking—complete with sleeping bags, clothes and enough food until Sunday—on our boat ride to the lighthouse.

## Arrival and Chores

If the lake is too rough, you can't get on or off the structure easily. You have to step directly from the tethered boat onto the rungs of a recessed ladder and climb 20 feet straight up to reach the deck on which the lighthouse is built—not for those with a fear of heights. As we rode out on the bobbing swells, I was a little (a lot) apprehensive, but I dismissed the scary thoughts and made the climb.

Finally standing on the pier deck, more than 20 feet above the water, the view took my breath away. It could have been 1936 as easily as it was 2006. Time stood still.

While we unloaded, evidence of frequent seagull visits was everywhere as the deck was scattered with droppings. Cleaning the deck and clearing away dead insects from the building would comprise our main chore list since we agreed to do cleaning and maintenance as part of our stay. So after hoisting up gear, getting a quick tour, turning on the hot water and UV water purifying system, and waving good-bye to Dave Bardsley and boat captain Ivan Gable, we were anxious to begin.

Todd and Sheri fired up the power washer and began the never-ending chore of scrubbing and washing the "poop deck." Dan grabbed the window cleaner and a broom to clear spider webs from the tower,



Cleaning spider webs.



Powerwashing the deck.



Freighter watching.



Dan and Todd entertaining boats.



The ride to shore (from left): Sheri and Todd Stepien, and Cindy and Dan Zuker.

while I cleaned floors and put food away in the living quarters. In charge of 'spiffing' up the place for the two-hour tours the next day, we took in the view as we worked, knowing there would be plenty of time to sit on the deck later.

### History of the Light

DeTour Reef Light has been showing vessels the way into the St. Mary's since 1931, marking a dangerous rocky reef. From 1848 until then, ships were guided by a beacon on the mainland at DeTour point, but as traffic increased and depth became a major concern, it was determined that a light set out in the water to mark the reef was needed.

Lighthouse keepers manned the place until it was automated in 1974. The light and fog horn are powered by solar panels, while Cloverland Electric Cooperative supplies electricity by cable from the mainland for the building. The historic lighthouse was rescued by the DRLPS in 1997 after the Coast Guard rendered it obsolete due to insufficient operating funds (see more on the DRLPS at right).

For ships traveling from lakes Huron and Michigan, DeTour Reef Light signals a "gateway to Superior." As many as 20 of the giants pass by each day of nearly 10 months every year, hauling iron ore, grain, coal and limestone. They are huge. And, we were surprised at the amount of water they push up with their bows at their steady pace as they vie for position to enter the river and proceed to the Soo Locks.

### Passing Time

There is a spectacular view from every window of the keepers' quarters on the second floor of the three-tiered Art Deco-style

structure. At the dining room table, we watched freighters approach from a large double window facing south. If the bugs or the breeze was too biting to stand outside, this was our favorite place to spend time and exchange stories about our lives and families, while always watching and commenting on the passing freighters.

But most often we stood or sat on the deck, taking in the view and climbing the tower to see how far the haze and clouds would allow us to see. We thought we could see the towers of the Mackinac Bridge at one point, and are quite sure we could see Bois Blanc Island. Dan wished he had brought a fishing pole, but couldn't imagine reeling up his catch all the way to the deck. And for a few minutes, Sheri and Todd put their kites up—amusing nearby boaters—but hurriedly brought them in when dark clouds approached to announce a possible thunderstorm. That evening, we were watching fireworks just above the tree line over DeTour Village.

I couldn't help but imagine being a keeper here in the 1930s. It was the Depression, and a hearty pot of soup must have gone a long way in contrast to the plentiful and handy snacks we brought with us. The log entries from those days describe lonely and desolate times with much isolation and monotony, not to mention the cold and dangerous high winds. To us, it was an ideal retreat with astounding views, great weather, good company, and an experience we'll never forget.

*To learn more about DeTour Reef Light, tours, and the Lighthouse Keeper Program, visit [www.drlps.com](http://www.drlps.com), or call 906-493-6079.*

## DRLPS Saves The Light

**T**HE DETOUR REEF LIGHT Preservation Society (DRLPS), a non-profit volunteer organization, was established in 1998 to restore and preserve the DeTour Reef Light. With federal, state, and private funding of well over \$1 million, the major restoration work was completed in 2004. Thanks to the DRLPS, the lighthouse will remain a magnificent monument to Michigan's maritime history for the enjoyment of generations to come.

Guided tours of the historic structure are typically scheduled every Saturday and Sunday from mid-June through mid-August. Guests are shown through the place from bottom to top while given a descriptive background and history as they view the amazing restoration work that's been done. A safety harness is used to climb from the boat up the ladder to get on and off the deck. The tours leave from Drummond Island and last about two hours.

Continued funding from membership dues, donations and fundraisers such as the Lighthouse Keeper Program and guided tours is required for the operation, maintenance, and continued restoration of DeTour Reef Light.



Become a member!  
Learn more, see  
more at [DRLPS.com](http://DRLPS.com)

Dave Bardsley, current DRLPS president, stands on the lantern deck with a view of Drummond Island behind him.



A tour guest climbs the ladder while wearing a safety harness.