

# The 'Lake Michigan Triangle' Enigma

Wednesday, March 12, 2014 16:03

**The Lake Michigan Triangle** is another geographical triangle, located in the middle of Lake Michigan. It, too, is the site of mysterious disappearances of both land and sea craft....similar characteristics of the Bermuda Triangle, including ghost ships, strange disappearances and even UFO sightings.

"There's been some strange disappearances out there, there's been many ships that have been lost that haven't been found."

Bill Wangemann is a historian from Sheboygan, Wisconsin. He's spent a lifetime gathering tales about the Lake Michigan triangle.

According to author Linda S. Godfrey in her book [Weird Michigan: Your Travel Guide to Michigan's Local Legends and Best Kept Secrets](#) the Michigan Triangle starts from the town of Ludington to Benton Harbor in Michigan; another links from Benton Harbor to Manitowoc, Wisconsin; the final side connects Manitowoc back to Ludington.

But the legend doesn't end with sunken ships; nearly 40 planes have disappeared over Lake Michigan too. Probably the most famous is northwest airlines flight 2501 that took off from New York City headed for Minneapolis in June of 1950 and plunged into Lake Michigan just off Benton Harbor. No one survived.

Then, there are the sightings of UFO's and other strange anomalies in the sky. In fact there have been so many sightings of strange objects and phantom planes that the Federal Aviation Administration created a special lake reporting service to catalog the reported sightings.

And yet still, thousands make the journey through the Triangle every season.

Captain Kevin Fitch of the Badger Ferry has been sailing Lake Michigan waters for nearly 30 years, "I've heard of it, I don't put a lot of faith in it but I have heard of it. Little bits and pieces here and there."

He says in the thousand trips he's made across the lake he's never seen anything strange. "I can't think of anything that didn't have an explanation of some kind."

So Captain Fitch continues to guide the ferry through what Wangemann says is considered the most dangerous part of the triangle.



“There’s dozen’s of these stories about different things that have occurred out there and people that have been lost and sailors that have disappeared off of ships and some people claim that there is something supernatural going on out on the lake,” says Wangemann.

The wreck of the schooner Rosa Belle and the loss of 11 crew members and passengers, all members of the Benton Harbor cult House of David, shocked the nation in the fall of 1921. The wreck was discovered on Oct. 30, floating upside down by the Grand Trunk car ferry Ann Arbor No. 4. The captain of the ferry said it appeared as if the schooner had been in a collision with another vessel. But no other ship was found to have been in a collision that week. The aft section was smashed, the cabin was wrenched away from the deck and the ship’s rigging was floating loosely about the hull. The mystery of what happened to the Rosa Belle was never solved.

Strange too was the fact that it was the second almost identical wreck for the Rosa Belle. The vessel capsized in the same area and drifted ashore near Grand Haven, Michigan, in August, 1875. Ten crew members were lost. The wreck was recovered at that time and rebuilt.

Among the strangest of the mysteries was the disappearance of the schooner Thomas Hume, which disappeared without a trace in a Lake Michigan gale on May 21, 1891, while sailing empty from Chicago to Muskegon, Michigan to pick up a load of lumber. Seven sailors, including Captain George C. Albrecht, were lost with the ship. Even though the lake was searched thoroughly, not a stick of lumber or piece of flotsam from a wreck was ever found. Old sailors speculated that the Hume, a wooden vessel, could not have sunk without some wreckage floating away. To this day, the Hume’s disappearance remains unsolved.

One of the most famous stories of disappearing crew members includes the freighter O.M. McFarland.

In April 1937, Captain George Donnor was heading to Port Washington, Wisconsin, “He decided to retire to his cabin for a nap, and he gave orders to be aroused about 6pm. And they went to his cabin and he was gone. The story was the cabin was locked from the inside and nobody knows what happened to him till this day,” says Wangemann.

During the time of Captain Donnor's disappearance the McFarland was crossing through the nexus of the Lake Michigan triangle along the same course of the Badger Ferry.

As the Badger Ferry continues on its journey, passengers are unaware of what might lurk in the deep lake waters. John Fangman: "I know there's a lot of mystery about the great lakes and legend and folklore."

Bill Wangemann says there are some tails of sea monsters. "Many years ago there were people that swore they saw sea monsters on the shore here," says Wagemann.

And some of the witness have quite a bit of credibility, "A Catholic priest went for a walk he saw this beast on the shore he said it was big and the color green," says Wangemann.

Sea monsters, ghost ships, disappearing planes and crew members, unidentified flying objects. It's the making of a good science fiction movie or a good legend.

Either way it certainly gives you something to think about as you look out onto Lake Michigan wondering what secrets she's keeping in her deep dark waters.

#### [Travel Channel Video – Lake Michigan Triangle](#)

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According to marine historian Dwight Bower in his book [Strange Adventures of the Great Lakes](#) the Michigan Triangle legend was born in 1937, when Captain George Donner unaccountably vanished from his freighter cabin during a routine coal delivery.

Having given strict instructions to be woken from his bed as the ship drew into port, Donner was nowhere to be found three hours later — despite his cabin door being locked from the inside.

Thirteen years later, Northwest Airlines Flight 2501 — carrying 55 passengers and three crew — left New York City for Minneapolis, only to seemingly evaporate from thin air as it passed over the Michigan Triangle.

The wreckage has never been discovered, despite being the subject of an annual search by the Michigan Shipwreck Research Associates, and investigations still continue in trying to explain the incident.

So, for sailors in search of a real close encounter, it could well be that Lake Michigan is, in fact, the best place for a creepy cruise.



*Flight 2501*

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### **Radar ‘Ghost Planes’ – Report: May 22, 2000**

*For the past five weeks, air traffic controllers at the O’Hare International Airport in Chicago, Illinois have been seeing images of “ghost planes” on their radar sets, usually in the skies of the Lake Michigan Triangle. The Triangle is an area of Lake Michigan which runs from Ludington, Michigan south to Benton Harbor, Mich., then across the lake to Manitowoc, Wisconsin and then back to Ludington.*

*According to the Chicago Sun-Times, “False radar images have been popping up on the screens of O’Hare International Airport’s air traffic controllers, forcing pilots to take sudden turns unnecessarily.”*

*“At least a dozen ‘ghost planes’ have been reported during the last few weeks, the newspaper said, citing documents from the Terminal Radar Approach Control Center in Elgin, Illinois (population 78,000).”*

*“Controllers said that at least a few times they have ordered pilots to take sudden turns to avoid what appeared to be planes on their radar, potentially putting passengers at risk.”*

*“‘The ghosting is a complete terror for air traffic controllers,’ said Charles Bunting, president of the Elgin local the National Air Traffic Controllers Association.”*

*Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) spokesman Tony Molinaro “said there have been 13 ghost images in the last five weeks rather than the usual eight or nine the FA would normally expect in this time period., ‘meaning we shall need to look into them.’”*

*“But Mike Egan, vice president of the controller’s union at Elgin, accused the FAA of playing down the problem. ‘Maybe 130, but not 13,’ Egan said Friday (May 19, 2000). ‘We had a couple of them today, as a matter of fact. They know there’s a problem.’”*

This all adds to the mythology of the lake, which is not prone to reveal its secrets. Lake Michigan is a treacherous lake and continues to be a source of fascination and inspiration for our collective imaginations.

### [The Lake Michigan Triangle – A Sailors Tale](#)

### [The Mysterious Lake Michigan Triangle](#)

**NOTE:** Former aviator Jay Gourley claimed in his book [The Great Lakes Triangle](#) that the Great Lakes account for more unexplained disappearances per unit area than the Bermuda Triangle. This is no small comparison, considering that the Bermuda Triangle is 16 times larger than the Great Lakes area. Gourley says:

Because of the irregular shape of the Great Lakes, pilots — aware of the dangers within — ordinarily circumnavigate the lakes, even when overflying might be shorter. It is almost impossible for even the slowest aircraft to be more than 20 minutes from land. Today's airliner can cross Lake Erie through the middle in ten minutes. Faster aircraft can do it in much less than four minutes. Over any point on any of the Great Lakes it is possible for the pilot of any jet airliner to shut down all his engines and literally glide to land. There are hundreds of ground-based, sea-based and air-based radios constantly monitoring emergency frequencies for any sign of trouble.

Aware of the curious incidents over the Great Lakes, the Federal Aviation Administration several years ago instituted a special "Lake Reporting Service;" pilots on Great Lakes overflights make continuous reports to ground stations. A 10-minute delay in such a report automatically launches a search-and-rescue operation. This service has saved many lives that would have been lost to ordinary accidents, but the high incidence of inexplicable disasters has remained unaffected.

### **Example...** [Vanished Over Lake Superior – Kinross AFB/F-89 Disappearance](#)

Though this post is concentrating on Lake Michigan, it does seem that the same phenomena seen in Lake Michigan has manifested in certain parts of the Great Lakes. Lon

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