

Canoeists find sights, services

The 1880s Paul Bunyan days are gone but their memories remain in the valleys of Michigan's Au Sable, Rifle and Thayer Bay rivers.

Once clogged each spring with the cream of Michigan's white pine forests, the rivers now carry thousands of canoeists each summer seeking past visible reminders of the lumbering era.

The Au Sable, synonymous with canoeing, is the longest of the three rivers. Its navigable, rapid-free branches meander 200 miles before emptying into Lake Huron at Oscoda, site of the annual Paul Bunyan Festival in mid-August.

The Au Sable was once a highway, floating enough logs which, when rafted, provided enough lumber to reach the moon if placed end to end.

Today it is the state's most canoe waterway.

MOST PADDLERS begin on the river's main stream in Grayling, named for the fish once native to the river and headwaters for at least eight liveries offering trips from two hours to seven days. Another livery is located upstream near Franconia.

The most popular trip is a four-hour float from Grayling to Stephen Bridge. The river flows gently on this route, taking canoeists past small brown and brook trout darting through the clear water.

This stretch is heavily canoe and paddlers might want to put in at Walsley Bridge further east, canoeing to McLeisters Bridge. It's a smooth three-hour float past stumps of once-giant pines partially hidden by second-growth forests.

FURTHER DOWNSTREAM, canoeists can rent craft at Luarna, McKinley, Glennon, Oscoda and also at Mio, a former lumberjack supply center. Paddlers also can see Mio's bicentennial amphitheater project being built on Mio Dam pond. Those tackling the entire river should plan on at least a week's travel from Grayling to Oscoda with portages at six dams. Camping is available at numerous private and publicly owned parks, including one on an island in Cooke Dam Pond near Oscoda. Designated Consumers Power Co. land is also available for campers.

The entire route, which takes canoeists past the famous Lumberman's Monument near Oscoda, is traced each summer during the Au Sable River Canoe Race.

Most trips down the river's famous South Branch start in Roscommon. Day-long floats from liveries there through the spectacular Mason Wilderness Tract are especially beautiful in fall or winter.

THE RIFLE, formed by several small creeks converging near Rose City, is good for young paddlers. It is dam-free with few rapids and depth of 14-18 inches. It also was used for logging in the 1880s, but not as extensively as the Au Sable. After the timber played out, land was sold for farming. Today most of the riverbank is aging shaded by foliage.

Canoeing the 100 miles from White Ash Bridge near Rose City to Omer takes three days. Only one state campground is available and few liveries offer riverbank campsites. Most paddlers spend overnight on

state land or seek private landowners for permission to camp.

Rifle River trips from one to three hours are most popular, with routes from Seltzer's Road to 46-50 and from White Ash Bridge to 46-50 lasting 75 minutes and four hours, respectively. The current is moderate with no rapids, but in late summer, which for boaters. There are liveries at Rose City and near West Branch, Sterling and Omer.

TWO YEARS before Michigan was a state, pioneers first set the Thayer Bay River's stands of white pine. In 1859, the first of 20 sawmills along its banks was built at Portland, and for 80 years, timber fed the city, now home of the world's largest Portland cement plant.

Canoeists usually start from liveries in Alcona and at the M-33 Bridge, or at the river's headwaters at Lake Pizen. The river is shallow and moderately fast, with fair numbers of trout.

Down at Alcona, just 10 miles from the river's mouth, the river races through two rapids separated by about five miles of smooth water. Novices might want to inspect these rapids before shooting through.

Four-mile dams before drifting into Alcona. River travelers can see work now being done on that city's bicentennial bicycle path and sculpture along the riverbank.

Ferry is active in Franklin

In these days of gigantic suspension bridges snaking across expanses of water, there seems little use for the old auto ferries that once plied their way and passengers from one point to another on the Great Lakes.

But three such cross-lake ferries remain in Michigan, still faithfully transporting customers across Lake Michigan.

One of these ferries is the "Viking," a former Ann Arbor Railroad ferry now cruising between Frankfort and Kewauenee, Wis.

Also in operation is a Cheese System passenger and auto ferry service between Ludington, Mich. and Milwaukee, Wis. and between Ludington and Manitowic, Wis.

THE VIKING began its career in 1925 as the Ann Arbor No. 7 and was built in 1905. It has a length of 300 feet, width of 58 feet and draft of 17 feet. The diesel-electric engine provides 7.5 tons of horsepower. It can carry thirty 40-foot raucars and 345 passengers.

The Viking holds from 15 to 30 automobiles and a nearly unlimited number of bicycles. Groups in buses are also welcome and receive special group fares.

The Viking currently makes two round trips daily between the two ports. Passengers aboard the ferry can enjoy on-board meals at regular dinner hours and can look forward to a relaxing four-hour cruise across Lake Michigan. Single and double occupancy staterooms are available for the privacy-minded.

ALTHOUGH THE ferry doesn't follow a published schedule, its two daily round trips usually leave Frankfort at about 9 a.m. and 9 p.m., arriving in Kewauenee at noon and 11 p.m.

An adult can take a round trip ride on the ferry for \$16.50, cars cost \$17.75. One-way, a single stateroom can be had for \$8 in addition to the fare. Children and bicycles are the best bargains, as a child can ride round trip for \$7.25 and a bike goes one way for only \$3.

Passengers are advised to call ahead to the Ann Arbor Railroad at Frankfort, (616) 352-7371, during business hours to check on availability of space for automobiles and to determine sailing time.

Flight practice
Man's first powered flight was made by the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk, N.C. on Dec. 17, 1903. Orville Wright was the first to soar over the sand dunes on that morning, managing to stay aloft for 12 seconds. At noon, his brother Wilbur kept the new flying machine in the air for 58 seconds. The brothers practiced their early aerodynamic experiments and made many of the parts for that historic airplane in their bicycle shop in Dayton, Ohio. That shop now stands at Greenfield Village. Next door is their house, also from Dayton, where the Wright Brothers lived at the time of their first flight.

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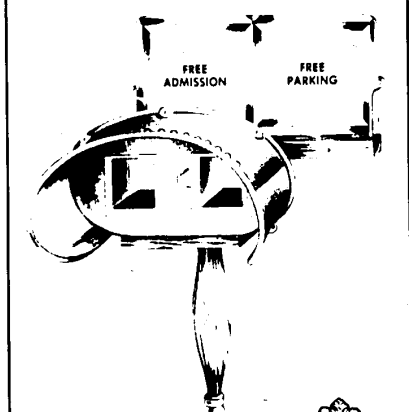
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