

# There but for sheer joy go they — annually

**travel log**  
**Iris Sanderson Jones**  
 contributing travel editor

## Those left holding the bags air gripes at Rep's forum

Disgruntled travelers told a lot of horror stories Thursday at Oakland Community College, where the second of three legislative hearings were held on the charter travel business in Michigan.

The hearing are led by state Rep. Tom Alley, D-West Branch, who was a member of the state Committee on Tourist Industry Relations when he experienced his first charter travel problems.

"I waited seven hours at Metropolitan Airport for a flight to take off for Las Vegas," Alley said. "I realize now that my problem was very small compared to those of other travelers."

"At that time, House Bill 4523 was already in the works, in an attempt to cure these problems. I think now that we may need even further legislation."

HB 4523 would require travel agents to register annually with the state, pay a \$100 annual fee and be bonded for \$50,000 if handling interstate or international travel worth more than \$10,000.

The bill also attempts to protect travelers against misrepresentation of transportation, hotels and tours, and against unfair contract provisions, bringing travel under the Michigan Consumer Protection Agency. And it would allow prosecution of travel operators, who can now be sued only in civil courts.

**THE PROBLEMS** aired at the hearing ranged from lost hotel rooms to outright abandonment by a tour operator. Several complaints were registered against Elliott Tours of Farmington, for allegedly substituting lowered hotel accommodations for more deluxe space promised, and the now-defunct Heritage Tours of Southfield.

Representatives of three different groups described their unsuccessful attempts to attend the Oberammergau Passion Play. In all three cases, complainants felt local travel agents had fulfilled their responsibilities but that the tour operator who sold the tour to the travel agent was responsible for the fiascos that followed.

Heritage Tours was blamed for leaving travelers without tickets to the Passion Play and sometimes without promised accommodations in Europe. An executive of that tour company was apparently jailed in Germany because of those tour-related activities.

**MATURE MINGLERS** of Bloomfield Hills and members of the First Baptist Church of Plymouth paid \$1,845 each for a trip contracted through local travel agents with Custom Tours of New York.

They did not see the Oberammergau play because no tickets were provided, nor were there accommodations. The groups missed the Vienna Boys Choir and other entertainment promised in Vienna and other places. And they spent 26 hours getting from Detroit to their first bed in Munich, a hardship especially for the older travelers.

Alley will explore future travel-related legislation. He urged consumers to be aware enough to find good tour operators.

"Call an airline such as United and ask about a tour operator," Alley said. "Check with other people who have taken tours. Call the Better Business Bureau. Be careful of what is being offered, especially at heavy discounts."

If you have information for the Committee on Tourist Industry Relations, plan to attend the final legislative hearing at 7 p.m. Sept. 17 in room 420-D of the state capitol in Lansing. Or contact Alley, c/o State Capitol, Lansing 48909.

By DORIS SCHARFENBERG

Gov. Milliken once loped across in a record 46 minutes and 50 seconds.

It took Edith Mackay of Traverse City a little more than four hours, but Mrs. Mackay is 76 years old and her arthritis is apt to slow her down.

Christopher Lincoln's parents pushed the 10-month-old in a stroller and made the crossing in an hour and a half.

Last year these people, plus 26,000 others, went north for Michigan's most popular sports event for untrained athletes: the five-mile Labor Day stroll across the Mackinac Bridge.

On the first Monday of every September, from the dawn hour of 7:30 until noon when the last starters are reaching the other side, a river of humanity flows over the straits, moving from north to south in a sky-high parade.

Not a march to raise funds or to bring attention to a cause, the thousands are there for the sheer joy of putting their feet on the concrete of a superbly beautiful bridge, a cream and green masterpiece set between the blues of sky and water.

For some folks the Labor Day walk has become an annual ritual, like birthdays and New Year's Eve. "I've walked the Big Mac five times already," said the intrepid Mrs. Mackay. "When I can't... well... I'll know my end is near."

Vans and cars come rolling into the huge parking area just west of the toll gates long before dawn, with license plates indicating an interest in bridge walking far beyond Michigan.

AT 7 A.M. the eager ones head toward the starting point. At this hour it is still very gray and the bridge towers look very far away.

First past the ropes are members of the International Walkers Association, given the go-ahead at 7:15. This is a big racing day for them, and they will be conducting races for men, women and children.

At 7:30 a.m. — down to the split second — Milliken, Lawrence Rubin, Mackinac Bridge director, and other celebrities are on their way, followed by the rank and file. (The presidential candidates have been invited to take a walk this year, but at press time there was no word if any accepted the invitation.)

"That Milliken pace darn near kills me to keep up with," said Rubin.

When former governor George Romney finished a bridge walk he asked for a glass of milk, so now there is what is called the Governor's Glass set on a wooden block with a brass plaque proclaiming the record times of governors.

Any governor of any state is welcome to try for the glass, which puts the trophy beyond ordinary reach.

Just plain folks have to compete against their own records and it is conceded that the earliest walkers are the fast crowd.

Since it is made clear there are no facilities along the route, the restrooms near the Administration building are crowded with one-last-timers. Smart participants have learned to shun morning coffee to cut down on the mid-bridge miseries.

Strollers, little red wagons to pull tots in, and wheelchairs are allowed, but roller skates, bicycles, unicycles, carriages and other wheeled gimmicks are forbidden. With the exception of seeing eye dogs, no dogs, not even tightly leashed ones, are allowed.

The rules also forbid running or playing tag in and out of the crowd. To enforce regulations and keep nonchalant types from sitting on the railings, members of the National Guard and various police departments are stationed a few yards apart.

Bridge traffic is confined to the two

west lanes while walkers take over the east (or Lake Huron) side of the road.

**THE FIRST GENTLE** uphill stretch is the coolest and the sunnier on a clear day can be an added wonder as it glints off the slate gray water. By 10 a.m. the chill is off, the water is a sparkling blue and you are treading on a passageway through sheer and lovely space.

Also at 10 a.m. the starting gates are closed and no one is allowed to begin their bridge walk after that. Such a seemingly early cut-off time makes for some hard feelings and even fistfights when officials tell would-be walkers (who may have driven all night to get there) they can't go on.

However, hundreds of local people are involved in making the bridge walk work and a lot of them have jobs to get back to.

On the south side of the bridge all

walkers are given a certificate, small but legal-looking, testifying to their accomplishment. Walkers are advised to check out the number on the back, it may entitle them to one of the prizes given out by local merchants.

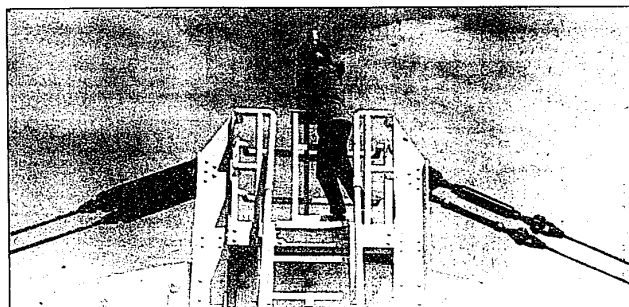
Although the bridge walk is free, there is a 50-cent charge for the bus ride back to the parking lot on the north side. Children younger than 12 accompanied by a parent ride free. No one is allowed to walk back across, not even Olympians in peak condition.

**THIS HIGH AND** handsome hike climaxes a weekend of pageantry at the Straits. Father Marquette's story as told in "The Black Gown Tree" is given free evening presentations on the St. Ignace waterfront and the capture of Fort Michilimackinac by the Indians is re-enacted in Mackinac City at the state park. (Admission charged).

While you're in the area take the ferry to Mackinac Island, climb Castle Rock just north of the bridge on I-75, enjoy the super-scenic sweep of coast line along U.S. 2, west of St. Ignace, or the regions around Cheboygan or Potosky. The new Pere Marquette memorial adjacent to the Mackinac Bridge approach, on the north side, is well worth a visit.

This will be the 23rd year for the walk and about 30,000 visitors are expected to show up. There isn't a more delightful way to spend a morning.

For more information: St. Ignace Chamber of Commerce, St. Ignace 49781; Upper Peninsula Travel and Recreation Association, P.O. Box 400, Iron Mountain 49801; East Michigan Tourist Association, 1 Wenonah Park, Bay City 48706; West Michigan Tourist Association, 135 Fulton E., Grand Rapids 49503.

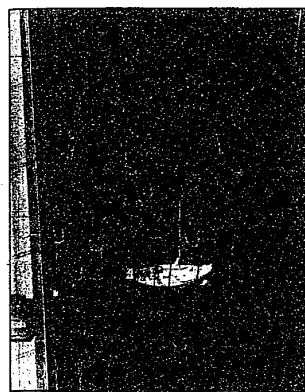


Looking unsure, but nevertheless still looking, Doris Scharfenberg has a vantage view from atop the south tower.

## 1 woman's climb to the top

The Mackinac Bridge has a special memory for Doris Scharfenberg, one of the few people taken to the top of a Mackinac Bridge tower.

"There I was with my arms around the light that keeps the airplanes from flying into the bridge. The wind was a



The view from the top of the south tower included this sailboat passing 552 feet below. (Photo by Doris Scharfenberg)

gale but the air was crystal-clear and the water — 552 feet below — was the bluest blue I've ever seen.

"I was being taken to the top with two other travel writers and a representative of the Travel Commission in Lansing. Accompanied by two engineers, we went up three at a time in a tiny elevator running inside the south tower. Except for steel plate and rivets, there was nothing to see.

"I wrongly assumed that the elevator would stop right on top and that would be all there was to it. But the little cage came to a halt at the bottom of the tower's top trusses, and opened over a hole right down to the water.

"A latent case of acrophobia nearly killed me then and there. The patient engineer's voice told me to reach over, grab a rail and simply step across the hole. Sure. Somehow I did it.

"Then there was a short scramble through some bulkheads toward a ladder 14 feet straight up and out through a hatch. Ladders that incline, I learned, are much easier than ladders going straight up. Especially when you're nearly numb with terror.

"Once I got through that hatch, however, everything relaxes. There were high railings all around and it was like being on the top of a space needle or on the top deck of a very tall ship.

"It was utterly, stunningly beautiful. The Mackinac Bridge seen from any angle, is a delight, but as my eyes followed the giant green cables down to the road and back up to the next tower I have never felt more respect for human talents.

"This bridge that couldn't be built weighs more than 12 Washington Monuments or 4,444 Statues of Liberty, putting all that wire and concrete across the Straits is surely a feat of giants.

"Visibility from the top is about 25 miles to the horizon, 353 feet to the road. I looked and stared and gaped and drank it in."