

Copper Country: Michigan's El Dorado

By Doris Scharfenberg
special writer

TO THOSE who squint at maps, the outline of Michigan's Upper Peninsula resembles a rabbit bounding westward. Its nose reaches for Wisconsin, forelegs are down in Menominee, ears bend together into Lake Superior to form the Keweenaw Peninsula.

Maybe the ears will look like a horn to you, but that's Copper Country, a scenic Michigan region totally unlike the soft glens of the Irish Hills

or orchardlands of Traverse, and looking a bit different to everyone who goes there.

Along this curving coast a great lake may crash moodily against rough rock formations nicknamed "Devil's Bathub," etc., or it may gently lap a beach of singing sand. Hillsides and forested vistas remind visitors of the Smokey Mountains, with the wide blue horizons of Superior as a bonus.

SOME OF THE oldest stone surfaces on earth are part of the cliffs

and ridges, eroded remnants of what they once were.

There are two state parks, a state university, a restored fort, lighthouses, Maine-like harbors, ghost towns, waterfalls, a dozen inland lakes, an airport with scheduled flights, friendly people and a city that came close to being chosen the state capital.

And there is history. One-hundred-fifty years ago this northern treasure became part of our state, just as Michigan was ushered into the Union. In settling a land squabble with Ohio, Congress favored the Buckeyes over the Wolverines, then tried to soothe ruffled feathers by granting Michigan additional land along the coast of Lake Superior. Only geologists and a few others were pleased. The rest sneered at Washington treasury.

Houghton didn't wait long to be proven correct. Six years before the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in California, our "useless" wilderness addition was being invaded with the same fervor that sent the '49ers to Ledo. The purest copper ever found were once sandwiched in the rock strata, and their discovery brought speculators, mushroom boom towns, wild times and a rush of hopeful immigrants from the mines of Europe.

IN TIME, THE income produced outdid the El Dorados of the west. Central, Phoenix, Ametek, Mohawk. Almost all the names on the Keweenaw map began with a mine shaft. In spite of porch additions and a variety of color trims, you know by architecturally pitched roofs which communities started off as company towns.

Stumbling into the bits and pieces of Keweenaw's history via ghost towns and logging trails is part of the visitor's fun.

The peninsula's Main Street is U.S. 41, an artery extending from Miami, Fla., to a mile past Copper Harbor, Michigan's northernmost village. Forty-one curves around the end of Keweenaw Bay, up through Chassel (site of a July Strawberry Festival) then along Portage Lake where strange gray sand is a reminder of the 10 copper stamping mills once operating here. Not awfully nice to walk on.

Houghton and Hancock, metro center for the region, perch across from each on hillsides steep enough to compete with San Francisco. Between them Portage Lake, very narrow and looking more like a river, once saved freighters the time and dangers of going around the peninsula's tip. Browse through the magnificent Seaman Mineral Museum at Michigan Technological University or watch the good ship Ranger II head through the lift bridge on its way to Isle Royale.

NEAR HANCOCK, home of historic Suomi College and hard-to-find courses in Finnish, the Arcadian Mine gives guided tours from mid-June to October. You are taken down to see how they operated and given enough data to emerge grateful for a desk job near a window.

U.S. 41 zigzags through Hancock's steep streets, curves out for a scenic

overlook and passes close to a Copper Country monument atop the hill. A hulk, a wreck, an unintended logo of the region is the giant rusting shaft house of Quincy Number Two mine.

It is one of the most-photographed relics of the north. Do NOT enter. Just how deep those old mines were is best told right next door; the steam hoist mechanism, open for summer viewers, was capable of lowering and raising men and ore a distance greater than 10 stacked Renaissance Centers.

In Calumet a must-see is the restored Opera House, where Sarah Bernhardt, Jenny Lind, Caruso, et al. performed back when the city bubbled with 45,000 residents. Calumet once had a higher tax base than Detroit, and many thought it should be the state capital. Ask about Calumet's walking tour, "A Step in Time," brochure/map available from the Chamber of Commerce.

Past towns and old mine sites, the road burrows and winds through a 10-mile tunnel of trees on its way to Copper Harbor. Lake Medora, site of bass conventions, will be on the left. A little farther the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge, a county-operated history and one of this writer's favorite get-away spots, will be nearly hidden in the pines on the right.

THE INVITING log Lodge, built by unemployed miners, has one of the largest stone fireplaces, warmest dining room in the state and offers a rare nine-hole golf course plus private duplex cabins close to Copper Harbor and the start of Brockway Mountain Drive. You might think the road was the product of a roller coaster design shop, but hang in there. The top of Brockway offers a view that will rearrange your ideas of Michigan.

In Copper Harbor: motels, restaurants, rock shops, a boat across the inlet to the lighthouse museum, sunset cruises on the "Island Queen," day trips to Isle Royale. Go beyond town to Fort Wilkins State Park, where a restored military post has tours and talks all summer. Campers should approach early in the day, as the popular park fills up quickly.

The road to Bete Gris ends on beaches so dry the sand squeaks. On the other side of the peninsula, M-26 twists like a corker next to the rocky shore, offering scenic lookouts and places to hunt agates as it goes to Eagle Harbor and Eagle River. E.H. has a splendid little bay and beach for swimming. If you can tolerate the abysmal cold of Lake Superior.

ANY NATIVE WILL provide a longer list of roads to explore, trails to hike, where to find thimbleberries.

Considering the iron ranges, copper mines and today's vacation pleasures, when Congress gave us the front end of the rabbit, they made Michigan richer than anyone's wildest dreams.

For more information: Upper Peninsula Travel and Recreation Association, P.O. Box 400, Iron Mountain, MI 49801. 908-774-5480.



Here's how you can participate in 150th birthday

THERE ARE thousands of events scheduled in Michigan this sesquicentennial year. Many of them are described in the stories and calendars of this travel section. Many others are incomplete, or the dates are not firm, so check the chamber of commerce in your favorite Michigan town or call the numbers listed in the Information Sources Box.

There are a few events, however, which will dominate the summer, so we tried to find out how you could take part in them. The Michigan Water Festival is a year long series of events covering every activity on water.

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) (517) 373-6714 is sponsoring Michigan Natural resources Week June 7-14.

THE CANOE FLOTILLA will fill the streams statewide June 13. It is designed as a mass participation event to grab your paddles. Any community, recreational agency or canoe livery was invited to organize a local flotilla and register the event with the state.

Watch for publicity this month (May) for flotillas statewide. You can bring your own canoe and join any of them. The closest flotillas to home will be two leading through Froid Lake and Island Lake state recreation areas to Kensington Metro Park. A large lakeside festival will follow.

FREE FISHING no licenses required, June 6 and 7 statewide. **FREE CAMPING** in the 150 rustic campgrounds of the Michigan Forestry Division June 6 and 7. They call it a Night in the Forest.

STATE PARKS OPEN HOUSE June 7: free admission (not free camping), and activities at all 83 state parks. That includes Mackinac Island State Park sites.

FREE BOAT LAUNCHING June 7, when state boating access sites waive fee.

WATCH THE PARADE of sail from any public area in Traverse City or the Leelanau Peninsula Saturday July 25. It is scheduled to coincide with the National Governors' Assn. conference so there will be big crowds.

The sailboats, tall ships, motor boats, brigantines, sloops will leave Stony Point in the Leelanau at 6:30 p.m., arrive in Traverse City about two hours later. At 10 p.m., \$40,000 worth of fireworks will light the sky.

INTERLOCHEN CELEBRATES that weekend, but there won't be much the public can attend. Try the US Navy Band concert Friday June 24, and go back for a great summer lineup.

SESQUITRAIN '87 invites you to drive a wagon, ride a horse or volunteer in any other way for the sesquicentennial wagon train that leaves Lansing for Charlotte June 15. It will circle mid-Michigan: Charlotte to Oliver June 16, on to Marshall June 17, to Albion June 18, to Jackson June 19.

Saturday and Sunday June 20 and 21 will be in Jackson, on to Stockbridge June 22, Fiskville June 23, Brighton June 24, Fowlerville June 25, Williamston June 26 and back to Lansing June 27.

TOUR DE MICHIGAN Aug. 20-30 is a bicycle event patterned after the famous Tour de France, which attracts 35 million spectators along a 21-day 2000 mile course. Tour de Michigan will cover 500 miles in 10 days.

The locations are Mackinac Bridge, Traverse City, Grand Rapids, Battle Creek, Lansing, Saginaw, Flint, Greshktown, Troy and Wyandotte. World Class riders from 10 countries will race on American style short/fast courses. Other races are for amateur and novice riders.

Recreational touring rides to the races will help raise money for the 1988 US Olympic Team. Special events celebrating our 150th birthday will be held at all the local areas.

The tour will include a number of time trials, road races and criteriums through some of the scenic areas of our sesquicentennial state. Call 547-0050 or contact Continental Sports Professionals, Inc., 33262 John R., Hazel Park, MI 48030.



The highest waterfall in Michigan is the Douglass Houghton Falls near Larium, Copper Country.

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