

Dixie begins with Kentucky

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THE STATE RESORT parks are especially appealing. They are comfortable and colorful. Most are located in rustic areas. They usually have a central lodge circled by cabins or cottages. All provide spectacular views.

There are 15 parks and we have stayed in more than half of them. Each has its own personality. At Lake Cumberland, wildlife sets the tone. White-tailed deer abound there. And on one hike I saw a woodchuck that looked as big as a beaver. The lake teems with fish.

Pine Mountain features back-country vistas. It is ringed by misty

Kentucky tips

Kentucky publicizes the "uncommon wealth" of things to do. There are lots of attractions. The Bluegrass State offers everything from modern resort parks and horse museums to mountain views and country markets.

Resort Parks:

Fifteen state resort parks dot Kentucky. The closest to suburban Detroit is General Butler on the Ohio River at Carrollton, the farthest away is Kentucky Dam Village in the state's western waterlands.

You can't go wrong by starting off with Carter Caves, Natural Bridge or Lake Cumberland. These parks are only a day's drive away, and each has its own distinct personality. For park information, call (800) 255-7275 or write to the Kentucky Department of Parks, Capital Plaza Tower, Frankfort, Kentucky, 40601.

Kentucky Horse Park:

If you like horses, the Horse Park is a must. It covers more than 1,000 acres and lies just off I-75 between Georgetown and Lexington.

The park offers a wide-screen film on horses, a museum tracing the history of the horse, a walk or wagon tour of barns and grounds and other horse-related attractions.

For more information on the Horse Park and other sites in the Lexington area, call (800) 848-1224.

Hotels:

Aside from the customary chains, you can find mom-and-pop motels that are clean, reasonably priced and homey. One of the best is the Winners Circle Motel at Georgetown.

Restaurants:

Wonder off the beaten path for "down home" restaurants. Most serve cornbread, grits, catfish, and other southern dishes. I recommend the Loudon Square Buffet in Lexington. It caters to native Kentuckians. Bring a big appetite and don't be ashamed to go back for seconds or thirds.

Kentucky crafts:

You'll find wood carvings, homemade furniture and other handcrafted articles all over the state. The Georgetown Flea Market is a gold mine for antique hunters. Berea, home of Berea College and Boone Tavern is another good place.

When to go:

Kentucky never gets as cold as Michigan. Her seasons are a couple of weeks ahead of ours. Spring and fall are splendid. Trees leaf out much earlier than ours and fall colors last longer. Dress for hot weather in the summer.

hills that deepen the mystery of the brooding Cumberland Forest.

Carter Caves, Natural Bridge offers exploration. The park is honeycombed with caverns, some not fully charted. I had my first taste of spelunking there.

Our guide led us along an underground corridor. Stopping at a two foot-wide tunnel, he said, "Keep them flashlights shinin' and your heads down. Now, y'all follow me."

He squeezed into the hole, and we wiggled in behind him. For the next two hours our group crawled through a maze of tunnels not much larger than roadway culverts.

We were so busy moving forward that claustrophobia never entered our minds. Then we stopped to rest. "Let's turn off them lights and set here a spell," the guide said after leading us into a low cavern.

I GOT TIRED of resting on my elbows and tried to sit up. My hand hit the ceiling. I panicked. Luckily, I managed to fight off my fear without anyone knowing it.

Our visit to Natural Bridge was less adventurous. But it had its moments.

The park's centerpiece is a natural sandstone bridge. There is a great view from the top. But you have to be careful. There are many rails to hang on to, and a misstep could trigger a nasty fall.

We had lunch in the park's dining room, resting on a "log" formed of sugarcured ham, red beans, white gravy and pecan pie.

We decided to drive through Red River Gorge on our way back to Georgetown. The gorge is within five miles of the park.

You can enter it through a mountain tunnel once used to snake out logs. Inside, scenic turnouts overlook forested slopes and rocky spires. Foot paths wind across the faces of cliffs. The Red River below sparkles in the midday sun. The gorge is a modern Shangri-la that will live forever because the federal govern-

ment has earmarked it a National Geological Area.

The four-lane super highway whisked us back to the motel in time to change and wash up for dinner.

THAT EVENING we had an early supper at Loudon Square Buffet in Lexington. We broke cornbread with native Kentuckians. Their tan cheeks and white foreheads made it obvious they were "country."

We meandered back to Georgetown along the Iron Works Pike. The two-lane blacktop stretches for several miles through horse country. On each side, lavish farmhouses and ornate stables dotted the landscape. Spring filled the air. Trees were leafing out over grass so green it looked blue.

The scene was spellbinding. Behind fences so white they glinted, foals frolicked awkwardly as brood mares munched contentedly on the lush pasture. A carpet of green swept as far as the eye could see. Crumbling rock walls built in Civil War days edged the roadway. We felt at ease with the world drifting along absorbing the southern ambience.

At the north end of the pike a gaggle of gray barns loomed over the farmland. They marked the Kentucky Horse Park. We didn't stop this time. But we usually go inside at least once a year to see if the museum still displays a sidesaddle we donated awhile back.

WE LEFT Kentucky for home early Sunday morning. Our stay had been brief but full; so busy it seemed like we had been gone a week, not two and a half days.

Our trip was not only short, it was inexpensive. Counting gas, lodging, meals and the flea market souvenirs, we had spent only \$137. That's a small price to pay for recharging your batteries in a bucolic "down home" atmosphere steeped in southern tradition.

So when suburban living gets you down and you feel the need for rest and rehabilitation, take that waitress seriously. "Y'all" climb into your car and make a beeline for Kentucky.

travel bits

A treat for Mom

Mother's Day is not over at Four Bears Park in Ulcin. As of June 4, every Monday is Mother's Day throughout the summer at Four Bears. Moms get in free when accompanied by a child with paid admission.

Free swimming lessons are available at noon so the children can learn about water safety while Mom enjoys her day in the sun. For directions and more information, call (313) 739-5800.

Monster contributes

(AP) — The fabled Loch Ness monster is worth \$42 million in annual tourist revenues to Scotland, a published report said Monday.

Half a million tourists visit the Highlands lake each year in hopes of seeing the creature, although there is no scientific proof it exists, said The Times of London.

It quoted Mackay Consultants of Inverness as saying the monster myth is also good for about 2,500

tourist-industry jobs. "We were amazed by the results of our research, which certainly puts the monster forward as one of the main attractions of Scotland," said a director of the firm, Tony Mackay.

He said reports of monster sightings help keep up tourist interest. The latest was last month, when a visitor from Glasgow claimed to have caught a glimpse of the creature, affectionately known as "Nessie."

The legend of large creatures living in 750-foot-deep Loch Ness has been around since the sixth century.

Ludington map

A new guide for Ludington and Mason County visitor's is now available featuring accommodations, activities and other travel information.

A complete calendar of events is included in the guide, along with marina and charter boat information, restaurant listings and a county map.

For a free copy of the Ludington and Mason County Visitors' Guide,

write to the Ludington Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, P.O. Box 160, Ludington, 49431. Or call the bureau, (800) 542-4600.

Frankenmuth cheese

The Frankenmuth Cheese Manufacturing Co. is finally open. After an absence of nearly 50 years, the original Frankenmuth cheese is once again being produced in Frankenmuth.

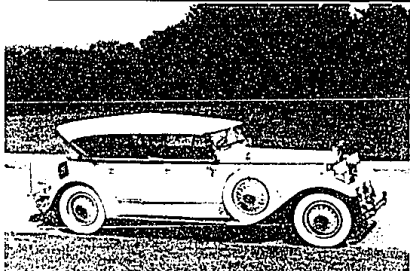
The cheese company is phase one of an agricultural theme park planned for Frankenmuth.

Visitors can view the cheese-making process and browse in the showroom, which suits a variety of cheese tastes. An on-site bakery and a showroom for St. Julian Wine, Michigan's oldest and largest winery, combine to make the stop both educational and tasteful.

The Frankenmuth Cheese Manufacturing Co. is across from Bronner's Christmas Wonderland and next to the Frankenmuth RV park, south of the downtown area.

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For more information, contact Boyne County Convention and Visitors Bureau, P.O. Box 691, Petoskey, MI 49770. Phone 1-800-845-2828 toll-free or 616-548-2755.



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