

## TRAVEL

## Mom and kids survive tenting on Tahquamenon

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SPECIAL WRITER

Not far from the "shores of Gitchegumme, by the shining big sea waters," we set up camp along the Tahquamenon River. It's a rustic site, but sufficient with ice cold spring water flowing from a pump and clean out-houses only a short walk away. Although I hadn't practiced putting up the little three-man tent, I know I remember how. It's only been about 15 years ago. My discerning 6-year-old son points out that we have too many extensions on the main pole.

Soon the tent is pitched on top of heavy plastic and covered with a nylon fly; ample rain protection. We move on to roasting hot dogs, then pull the rest of our dinner out of a cooler filled with fruit, milk, ice and giant nightcrawlers (in a sealed container, of course).

It's the first time in a long time that I have been "tent camping." And the only time I have gone camping solo, with only my two children, ages 6 and

9. We are on a walk-about in the Upper Peninsula, and my companions are ready for adventure. I am too, I think.

We bait our hooks with juicy nightcrawlers and fish the river after dinner. It doesn't matter that the fish aren't biting. It's liberating just sitting on the bank of that lazy river and watching the baby-blue pink sunset—together.

At dawn ... who are we kidding, we are still fast asleep at dawn. But early enough, we wake to the screeching of sea gulls and geese on the dale. We know better. Tough love is required to be environmentally correct. It's cold cereal and juice for the kids, and a perceivable lack of Java for me. The wildlife must fend for themselves.

After breaking camp, we take in Tahquamenon Falls, cascades of foamy root beer surrounded by ancient cedars. A short drive brings us to the Lake Superior shoreline. We meander the beach collecting coveted stones and agates and splash in the waves at Whitefish Point. I think about the Edmund Fitzgerald,

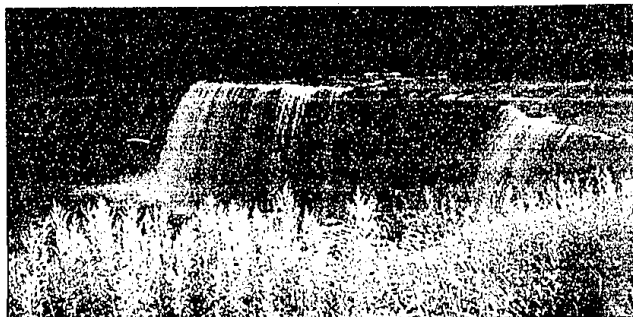
entombed in those frigid waters, only 17 miles off shore.

What better way to spend our last carefree days of summer than wandering the natural wonders of the Upper Peninsula, enjoying the impromptu beach-side picnics and long hikes through unspoiled woodlands. In Munising, our eighteenth gets the best of us; we neglect to find a campsite early on. It's well past supper time as we circle the state and private campgrounds that hug Lake Superior off Highway 28. No vacancies.

Now what? "Don't panic," I say to myself as we pass motel upon motel with their No Vacancy signs ablaze. We have come to camp and camp we shall. We continue west until I glimpse a sign for Hiawatha National Forest Campground. Through the tiny town of Au Train, past the cottages on Lake Au Train and deep into the protected forest on the opposing shore, I find our lodging. It's perfect. Thirty or so secluded picnic sites nestled in the middle of nowhere. Most of the sites are unoccupied. Our site is circled by splendid hard wood trees that whistle in the wind as we make camp. We are really good at this now. The fire pit is ready for our evening camp. We decide to backtrack to Lake Superior for a sunset picnic supper. Under a darkening sky we head back to camp.

The drive back seems a little longer and whole lot darker. I catch sight of two deer in my headlights as we make our way back, singing a family favorite about "ants playing pinocchio on your snout." The campfire is exceptionally dark. Apparently National Forest campers adhere to the old adage, "Early to bed, early to rise." Our site is one of only three campfires blazing tonight.

Around 3 a.m., my son catapults up from his sleeping bag and screams, "I'm scared." He's



Natural wonder: The Tahquamenon Falls is one of the Upper Peninsula's most famous sights.

half asleep, but now I'm wide awake. He has to go to the bathroom. I turn on my four-inch mini flashlight and tell him to go right outside the tent.

Back in my sleeping bag, I lay still but unable to sleep. The eerie sounds of drizzle and the wind whipping through the enclave of trees feed my imagination. It's really black and I envision "stuff" out there.

The wind and the cracklings give way to footsteps. Definitely a cadence. Definitely coming toward our site. "Why on earth would someone be coming through our camp site?" My ears become huge. The sound moves deliberately in front of my little pup tent's closed door flap and around to my side. Inches from my head, I hear three long panting sounds that throw me into the scene in "Pulp Fiction" where that chick gets a shot of adrenaline to her heart. With

outrageous energy pulsing through my veins, all I can think is DON'T MOVE ... and God, please don't let the kids wake up.

I decide I need to do something. Somewhere in my subconscious, I had prepared for this very possibility tonight. I had placed my small flashlight within reach, as well as a can of pepper spray. I reach for both. Nothing changes until I turn on the dim light. IT stirs, only millimeters of fabric between us. I lay immobile for a few minutes. Crawling over sleeping children to the small triangular opening in our tent door, I turn my pitiful light to the surrounding woods. Then I see them. Two beady eyes off in the darkness, peering right back at me. There was no point in looking further. I jump back in my bag and lay there for the longest three hours, flashlight in hand, pepper spray in the other.

In the morning I was most definitely up with the sun. Usually we dress, eat breakfast and break camp in about 45 minutes. We set a new record.

I can't say for certain what was outside our tent that night. The ranger at Seelye Wildlife Refuge later told me it was not a coyote as I had suspected. Most likely, he assures me, it was either a wolf, or more probably a female bear in heat, looking for food.

Perhaps I should have tried to get a closer look. Next time, maybe I will. But next time, I think I'll be in our pop-up metal camper, armed with a much bigger flashlight, my trusty pepper spray, a bullhorn and maybe my 6-foot-3 husband to share the experience.

Theresa McFarland is a freelance writer who lives in Farmington Hills.



Spillsh-aplash: Alex and AJ frolic in the waves at Whitefish point.

## GREAT ESCAPES

Great Escapes features various travel news items. Send news leads to Hugh Gallagher, assistant managing editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (313) 591-7279.

## PARIS OPERA TRIP

David Green is hosting a trip to Paris, France, to see three operas. Green of Livonia, who has hosted numerous trips to Europe, said this trip Feb. 10-18, 1998, is a chance to see the City of Lights during the winter season.

The trip costs \$2,110 and includes round trip airfare from Detroit, transfers, hotel, breakfast each day, two deluxe dinners, category A tickets to two operas and an option to see a third opera. The operas planned are "Carmen," "Tosca" and "Tris-

tan and Isolde." In addition Green will lead tours of Paris landmarks.

For more information, call 313-255-9666.

## FISHING GUIDE

The Ottawa County Fishing Guide is now available free to the public. The guide features: tips on salmon, trout, perch, walleye, bass and other pan fish; an area map of fishing access sites and boat launch ramps; charter companies, bait and fishing sports shops, marinas and boat rentals; lodging and dining information in Grand Haven and Holland; and access to local fishing reports.

To receive a copy of the free Fishing Guide and other travel information, call the Grand Haven/Spring Lake Area Visitors Bureau at 1-800-303-4096 or by the web at [www.grandhaven.org](http://www.grandhaven.org)

chamber.org or the Holland Area Convention & Visitors Bureau at 1-800-506-1299 or by the web at [www.holland.org/hcvb](http://www.holland.org/hcvb)

## LONG WEEKENDER

British Airways is offering its nonrefundable seat sale Long Weekender program. The Long Weekender fare to London is \$339 roundtrip, for travel in British Airways World Traveller economy class. Long Weekender is valid for travel outbound on Thursdays and Fridays only, from Oct. 23, 1997, through March 27, 1998, except for black-out dates of Dec. 11, 1997, through Jan. 6, 1998.

There is no minimum stay and a five-day maximum stay requirement applies. Reservations for all sectors must be completed at least three days prior to departure. Ticketing and payment must be completed within

24 hours or reservation or three days prior to departure, whichever occurs first. Tickets may be issued until March 24. Long Weekender is nonrefundable but changes may be made

for a fee of \$150 per transaction. The fare is available from select USA Gateways. For information, call 1-800-AIRWAYS.

## HEMINGWAY FESTIVAL

On Oct. 16-19, Petoskey will

hold a Hemingway Festival to celebrate the life and work of author Ernest Hemingway. For more information, contact the Petoskey Regional Chamber of Commerce at 616-347-4150.

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