

Adventure Alert!

Live it UP in Michigan's U.P.

by Colleen Birch Maile

Here's a survey for you. Answer the following to gauge your vacation style: Grave adventure? Love nature? Care about history? Reply "yes" to any of the above? Then start making plans to visit the Keweenaw Peninsula—the far northern tip of Michigan's U.P.

When it comes to outdoor action there's never an off-season. Michigan's deep woods and Lake Superior's gorgeous south shore make a phenomenal backdrop for a bevy of activity. Each season holds its own brand of splendor. Autumn transforms the region's hardwood forests into a vivid blaze of orange, red and gold, punctuated by the occasional evergreen.

In fall, outdoor fun inevitably benefits from a leaf-peeper vibe. Dozens of trails, well suited for hikers of all abilities, wind throughout Houghton and Keweenaw counties. Of special interest, the Estivant Pines Nature Preserve near Eagle Harbor, 30 miles north of the Houghton County Airport in Hancock. The Estivant Preserve protects more than 500 acres of huge virgin white pine—one of the last remaining groves in Michigan. There are plenty of other trails closer to Houghton and its sister city Hancock, including the easy 1.5-mile course through Sturgeon Slough Wildlife Area just three

miles south of Houghton. For more information, consult the UP Michigan Trails Association website www.uptrails.org.

Mountain biking enthusiasts find plenty to love here too. The Copper Harbor Trails system ranks among only 48 pathways in the world to be designated an Epic Trail by the International Mountain Biking Association. Its 25 miles carry riders along Lake Superior, through deep woods, across wooden bridges, beside streams and inland lakes and near historically significant sites. Copper mining fueled the peninsula's development at the turn of the 20th century. Now abandoned railways convert to phenomenal mountain bike trails, including the 41-mile Bill Nicholls Rail Trail between Houghton and Mass City and the 14-mile Jack Stevens Trail linking Hancock with historic Calumet. Learn more about two-wheel excursions from the Michigan Mountain Bike Association at www.mmba.org.

It's not necessary to break a sweat to take in autumn's wonders. The Keweenaw serves up several spectacular autumn drives. Among the most breathtaking, U.S. Highway 41 between Copper Harbor and Delaware is designated a Scenic Heritage Route due largely to the amazing canopy of foliage covering the passageway. Brockway Drive,

a picturesque nine-mile loop west of Copper Harbor, has repeatedly been recognized for its exceptional views by publications ranging from *The New York Times* to *Michigan Living*. The roadway climbs to an elevation of 1,300 feet (700 feet above the surface of Lake Superior.) On a clear day, it's possible to see Isle Royale National Park 50 miles away.

Autumn foliage varies from year to year. Typically mid-October brings the season to a close and ushers in winter. Snow falls deep in copper country. U.P. residents, known as "yoopers," enthusiastically embrace the more than 300 annual inches of white stuff. Some roadways such as Brockway Mountain Drive close for the season. Locals and others in the know enjoy its astounding views from snowmobiles. Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are popular too. Trails are seemingly everywhere. Check out McClain State Park in Hancock for exquisite Lake Superior vistas and Swedetown in Calumet for a variety of groomed paths plus 5K of lighted trails for night skiing.

The region is also home to some of the Midwest's best downhill skiing. Mount Ripley in downtown Houghton offers lots of family fun, while Mount Bohemia, approximately 30 miles from the airport, is the place for extremists and thrill seekers. Home to the Midwest's only triple

black diamond run, it also boasts extreme back-country skiing and a vertical drop of 900 feet—the steepest in the Midwest. There are no beginner runs. Keweenaw Mountain Lodge in Copper Harbor, 40 miles north of the airport, is home to a snowboard terrain park and ice-skating venue.

Ten other area rinks range from neighborhood facilities to the indoor arena at Michigan Technological University (open to the public on Sunday afternoons). The school fields an ice hockey team worth watching and adds college-town culture to the region. It also puts on one of the nation's most amazing winter carnivals (the 91st annual rendition will be held February 9-12 2012).

The event comes on the heels of the Finnish-American community's Midwinter Heikinpäivä celebration. A week of events begins January 28, 2012 and includes a polar bear dive on the Hancock waterfront, parade and all the food and fun associated with most family-friendly festivals. In addition, there are uniquely Finnish activities—classes in woodcarving, tating, and Finnish food preparation plus entertainment including a traditional hymn sing-along, Finnish buffet and a tanssit (dance).

In many snowy locales, springtime means mud season pure and simple. However, when the Keweenaw's deep drifts thaw, the area's waterfalls are at their best. Most of the peninsula's ten falls are



The Polar Bear Dive at Heikinpäivä celebrates midwinter in Finnish style.



Finnish kicksleds at the Heikinpäivä festival.

HEIKINPÄIVÄ IMAGES: JAMES KURTZ/THE FINNISH-AMERICAN REPORTER



easily accessed by good roads. Jacob's Falls, three miles northeast of Lac LaBelle, is visible from Michigan Highway 26. The same road through the township of Eagle River leads to the aptly named Eagle River Falls. Haven Falls on the Lac Labelle Road east of Delaware features a nice picnic area and a trail leading right up to the torrent. To plan a spring driving tour check out www.keweenaw.info/attractions/waterfalls. Bird watching, a

year-round pursuit on the Keweenaw, is especially interesting in spring, when migrating flocks fill the sky. In spring and summer keep a look out for eagles, loons, sandhill cranes and blue heron. They're among the 300 species the Audubon Society identifies as native to the region.

Summer is glorious with a seemingly endless list of outdoor fun. Take to the trails on foot or bicycle. Kayak through Lake Superior's ocean-like waters. Hunt for agates along the rugged shoreline. Canoe across a placid inland lake. Go fishing, sailing, water skiing or swimming. Scuba divers flock to the Keweenaw Underwater Preserve, a

103-square-mile area where the remains of ten wrecked ships offer a chance to explore the past. Several charter companies show divers the best spots for watery adventure.

Those who prefer to remain on dry ground can get a glimpse of the region's seafaring legacy by visiting a lighthouse. There are ten in the area. Several, including those at Eagle Harbor (built in 1871) and Copper Harbor (built in 1866 and accessible by boat from the Copper Harbor Marina) are open daily from early June through October. Others such as the Sand Hills Lighthouse Inn are now privately owned but are still easily seen by boat. The Isle Royale Lighthouse in the national park of the same name is also open via guided excursion. There are three lighthouses in the park—scant human imprints on an otherwise pristine environment. Motorized vehicles are not allowed on Isle Royale and the other smaller islands that make up this wilderness area. Pets are prohibited as well.



Copper Harbor Lighthouse



Camping on Lake Superior



Bicycling mountain trails

Accessed only by floatplane or ferry (from Copper Harbor and Houghton as well as Grand Portage Minnesota), it takes better than three hours to make the trip over the water. There is a lodge and more than 30 campgrounds—some accessible only by canoe. This is the place to escape civilization. Despite its breathtaking beauty, an abundance of wildlife (including wolves and moose but no bears), more than 165 miles of hiking trails and a bounty of inland lakes and streams, Isle Royale is consistently among the least frequented national parks. Fewer than 20,000 people visit each year—less than Yellowstone's daily summer tally. That's due in part to its relatively short season. Isle Royale opens April 16 and closes entirely November 1. It is the only national park to shut down completely for the winter.

The region is also home to the sprawling Keweenaw National Historical Park. Around the turn of the 20th century, copper mining drew immigrant laborers from Scandinavia and eastern Europe to the U.P. Their legacy lives on in preserves in Calumet and Quincy, as well as 19 other heritage sites. They include remnants of mining's heyday—the mansions of corporate titans, a 1,200-seat opera house, opulent churches and relics of the mining operations. The entire village of Calumet is designated a National Historic site while the park's Quincy unit continues to maintain the mine's original steam powered hoist—the world's largest. The vestiges of smaller mines as well as a roster of museums dedicated to the mining era dot the peninsula.

There's so much to see and do on the Keweenaw one trip is not enough. Spend a weekend, and plan to return for a week or more. All the wonders of the U.P.'s most uplifting territory are easily accessed with United Express service operated by SkyWest Airlines. Daily flights connect the peninsula with Chicago. ■



Keweenaw National Historical Park History Center



Isle Royale National Park Tobin Trail

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