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Excerpts from:

Michigan's Inland Waterway

From Petoskey to Cheboygan

By Carl Olson

Recently, I asked someone if they had heard of the Inland Waterway Route and the response was, "Of course. It runs along the East Coast to Florida."

Wrong! It's right here in Michigan. It runs from Petoskey to Cheboygan, passing through Crooked Lake, Crooked River, Burt Lake, Indian River, Mullett Lake and the Cheboygan River into Lake Huron.

This water route has a recorded history going back well over 100 years and was first used by Indians in canoes as a shortcut from Lake Michigan to Lake Huron across the northern tip of the Lower Peninsula.

The first improvement to the waterway came in 1874 when a large sandbar at the head of the Indian River was removed, making the route navigable to larger boats.

During Michigan's lumbering era, the system was used extensively for transporting forest products and supplying lumber camps which dotted the area.

Around the turn of the century, small steam-powered excursion boats carried tourists and picnickers from the town of Conway on the western shore of Crooked Lake to the old resort hotel at Topinabee on Mullett Lake.

If you stay to the northwest side of Mullett Lake you'll soon pass Topinabee, the resort destination of the early steamers. Docks are available and, if you would like to see a bit more Michigan history, stop for a while and walk.

Our trip across the lake, about 12 miles, was done at high speed, and we were concerned that our fuel wouldn't last until Cheboygan. So we stopped just inside the mouth of the Cheboygan River at Hack-Ma-Tack Inn to top the tanks. This is a beautiful wooden lodge with excellent dining facilities and docking right outside bay windows overlooking the river. You might call ahead for reservations and meal times (231-625-2919).