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WEEKENDER

MULLETT LAKE

article by Tom Huggler

Last summer I was thinking of running the following ad in our local newspaper:

Single-engine powerboater desperately seeking compatible inland lake for fun-filled weekends away from home. I'm a full-throttle kind of guy who hates crowds and cramped little waterways. My perfect lake would be pristine, loaded with fun options, and accommodating—on both water and shore—to a boater interested in spending the night. If you are, or know of, such a boating paradise, please call collect at....

Then I found Mullett Lake at the northern tip of Michigan's lower peninsula, and my days of searching came to an end.

Of the three big sisters in the area (Burt, Black, and Mullett lakes), Mullett gets the least amount of boating activity, despite being larger than its siblings. In fact, at more than 16,000 surface acres, Mullett Lake is the third-largest inland lake in Michigan, behind Houghton and Torch. This 10-mile-long gem is 2 to 3 miles wide, and its gray-green waters lap shores of upland forest as well as the tidy lawns of homeowners and summer cottagers. Old U.S. 27 parallels the west shore, and M-33 half-circles the east side.

Situated on the famed Inland Waterway that very nearly links lakes Huron and Michigan, Mullett lies just off a northeast to southwest axis. The Indian River flows into its southern end; the Cheboygan River empties at the northern end.

Imagine meandering along the no-wake Cheboygan River with its tightly dredged channel. Quite possibly you were delayed a quarter-hour at the downstream lock above the small city of Cheboygan. Then you lingered over lunch at the Hack-Ma-Tack Inn, a 100-year-old establishment located right on the river. Back in your boat, you're ready to run, and a few hundred yards upriver you spot the wide-open expanse of Mullett Lake.

Upon leaving the river channel behind, you can't resist grabbing a handful of rpms and blasting across this enormous watery playground.

If you tire of cruising, fishing, swimming, or camping, check out the gold courses at Indian River and Cheboygan. Trailering your boat for weekend fun offers the advantages of driving somewhere else if you get the lookabouts. We have enjoyed visiting the Cheboygan County Historical Museum in Cheboygan and the 55-foot-high Cross in the Woods shrine at Indian River, as well as shopping at specialty stores in both towns.

Good dining establishments abound in this popular region of northern Michigan. My favorite, though, is the Hack-Ma-Tack Inn, famous for its two-inch prime rib sumptuously prepared by Chef Bernard Gauthier. For some reason food tastes better when you can dine while watching your moored boat bobbing on the wakes of the parade of cruisers on the river. Our ensuing sundown return trip on Mullett Lake was infinitely more interesting than taking the highway home. Besides, it allowed more time to digest a dessert of Hack-Ma-Tack ice cream pie.

On this warm and carefree evening last August, we tied up at the state park campsite and watched the sun slide below low western clouds. A lone fisherman perched at the breakwater point was a silhouette of patience waiting for something to bite. Not a single boat wake disturbed the lake, all the Inland Waterway voyagers having retired for the night.

As the sky changed from blazing orange to a soft rose, the fisherman reeled in his line and went home. Mullett Lake was mine, and I admit to having wondered whether or not I should write about this northern find after all. Some treasures are better left a secret, I suppose, but 25 square miles of largely ignored water can surely handle a few more boaters. Can't it?