

The following three narratives provide historic glimpses of the importance of the Inland Waterway and Straits of Mackinac Coastal water trails.

The Inland Waterways of Northern Michigan: An Indigenous History of Michigan's Most Valued Resource, by Eric Hemenway

The inland waterways that stretch across Cheboygan and Emmet Counties in northern Michigan, effectively connecting Lake Huron and Lake Michigan, today are known for their beauty, recreation opportunities and resource of fresh water. Fishing, motor sports enthusiasts and paddlers from all regions take advantage of this rich resource. Summer homes dot the shorelines of Crooked Lake, Burt Lake and Mullet Lake. But the inland waterway route has a history that spans thousands of years, starting with the indigenous people of the Great Lakes; the Anishnaabek (Odawa, Ojibway and Potawatomi). The Anishnaabek history on the water route is one filled with war, struggle to maintain resources and sense of place.

The Anishnaabek relied heavily on the fresh water of the Great Lakes and the many inland lakes, rivers and streams for their livelihood, economics, traditions, beliefs and a critical food source. Game would often dwindle on the main lands of Michigan but the lakes and streams were a more reliable source of food. Lake Michigan and Huron would supply fishermen, who were daring enough to venture on their waters, with a bounty of whitefish, sturgeon and lake trout. Inland waterways and lakes held large supplies of not only fish but game, such as beavers and muskrats. And of course is the obvious resource of fresh water, which no population can be sustained without. The northern Michigan inland water route is like thousands of others in the Great Lakes but yet has its own unique history, mainly in relation to the Odawa.

The Odawa have lived in the Great lakes for thousands of years but came to occupy northern Michigan at the expense of other tribes; the Mushcodesh and Assegun. Through a terrible war, the Odawa expelled these two from Emmet County during the 15th century. Coming from Odawa Minnis (Odawa Island/ Manitoulin Island), the great war chief Sagima and his war party travelled by canoe to wage this war. One of the battles took place at the mouth of the Cheboygan River, as Odawa warriors ambushed a party of Assegun warriors. According to legend, the war was waged over the killing of Odawa women planting corn at the straits of Mackinac and insults directed towards Sagima and his war party upon an unsuccessful venture west.

War would visit northern Michigan several times in the course of the next three centuries. The root of all of these conflicts would be control of the natural resources that resided in Michigan and other areas in the Great Lakes. The Iroquois would wage a terrible war from 1640-1701 throughout the Great Lakes starting east by destroying the Huron. Large war parties of Iroquois, which were primarily the Seneca and Mohawk of the confederacy, pushed as far west as Wisconsin, driving the Odawa from Michigan. This is the only war that displaced the Odawa from northern Michigan. By 1670, the Odawa, Ojibway and other Anishnaabek banded together and began defeating the Iroquois. In 1670, Odawa re-established villages at the present day St. Ignace. The Huron, effectively refugees at this point, were permitted to have villages at

Mackinac as well. The war did not end in 1670. Anishnaabek war parties began taking the fight to the Iroquois in their lands in New York. By 1695, attacks by the Odawa, Ojibway and their allied forces became so severe in New York, peace was negotiated. In 1701, the Great Peace of Montreal ended one of the most horrible wars in the Great Lakes.

The resources the Iroquois wanted so desperately were beaver pelts and people. Beaver pelts were the main trading commodity of the day and control of their habitats translated into control of economics. Beaver pelts were used in trade to acquire firearms, metal goods and cloth. All of these new technologies becoming more desired every year by tribal communities. War parties used firearms against enemies whom did not had a huge advantage. Controlling the trade and areas of natural resources also meant controlling alliances and politics as well. The Iroquois also waged a war for people, to replenish their dwindling numbers they suffered from disease and warfare. Women and children also became objects of conquest.

An area such as the inland waterway would have been a prized possession during this war. It offered an abundance of habitats where fur bearing animals could thrive. Also, it was important in travel, as it offered an alternate route west. The Straits of Mackinac can be an unforgiving nautical journey, especially by canoe, which was the primary mode of transportation during the time. The inland water route could offer a safer alternative during harsh weather and the element of surprise in war. The Odawa fought hard with the Anishnaabek kin to keep the waterway, and many other like it, in their control. It is very likely this waterway was used by the Odawa on their way east to raid Iroquois villages and to trap beavers to use in trade. A beaver caught in the Crooked River could be traded for kettles brought from Europe. The beaver pelt would make the trip to France, where it would be used as a hat. The kettle it was traded for very likely could make its way far west as Manitoba, where the Odawa had trading partners with the Cree tribe. Such natural resources as the inland waterway were part of an intricate cultural, political and economic system.

War would come again in 1754 but on even larger scale. The French and Indian war saw thousands of Great Lakes tribes, northern Michigan Odawa included, fight with the French to drive the British out of the upper Great Lakes. Again, the fight to control land and resources was at the heart of the war. Beaver pelts were still in high demand, as was land for expanding European nations in North America. And again, the inland waterway would have been a prime area, based on the same reasons in the Iroquois war. Only by 1760's, Mackinac had grown to become the preeminent trading center in the Great Lakes, making the real estate that much more valuable. The French would concede to the British eventually but tribes did not.

Great Lakes Indians would fight for the next 60 years to control their ancestral lands. Pontiac's War, American Revolution, North West war and War of 1812 all saw tribes fight, primarily against the Americans. The warriors won many battles but lost the overall war to keep the Americans out. Upon the conclusion of the War of 1812, life for the Odawa in northern Michigan would quickly shift.

A chief for the Odawa, Chingmasso (Big Sail) would have his village site along the Cheboygan river in 1830, near Mullet Lake. Fearing his band's removal to Kansas as part of the Indian Removal Policy under President Andrew Jackson, Chingmasso would move his village to Manitoulin Island, Ontario. Several other Odawa chiefs from Little Traverse had already relocated to Manitoulin by 1840, such as Assiagnack and Mookmanish. The remaining Odawa at Little Traverse and Burt Lake during the mid-19th century fought to have their treaty rights recognized by both federal and state officials. The Burt Lake Band of Ottawa Indians would be victim to one of the worst violations of human rights in Northern Michigan history. In 1900, timber speculator John McGinn and Cheboygan County Sheriff Fred Ming went to the Odawa settlement at Burt Lake. Finding the men gone to work and the small village inhabited by women, elderly and children, the two men proceeded to evict all the Odawa from their homes. Personal belongings were thrown into the street and all the Odawa cabins were set ablaze. Dozens of homeless Odawa watched their homes burn and could do nothing about it. The survivors of this atrocity walked the thirty plus miles to Cross Village, to seek help from relatives.

John McGinn argued that he bought the property from back taxes and the land was rightfully his. The Odawa of Burt Lake argued the land was part of a reservation and was exempt from taxes. The Odawa argument would not be heard and McGinn was free to claim the lands as his. The Burt Lake Odawa would assert the lands were reservation well into the 20th century. The Burt Lake burnout is one of the most brutal land grabs in Michigan history and the descendants of this horrible act still live with this legacy in their families.

The history of this unique water route goes well beyond transportation and recreation. Ancient tribal wars were waged along this route. It has a history that has international ties during the French and Indian War. It has the darker side of human nature with the Burt Lake burnout. All of this history is directly interwoven with the Odawa of northern Michigan.

Boating history of the Straits, by Sandy Planisek

The boating history of the Straits began thousands of years ago and continues its evolution today. Even as you read this, the boats and boat companies change. The first people to visit the Mackinac region came just after the glaciers retreated about 10,000 years ago. They were summer hunters stalking the big game of mastodons and mammoths, trudging by foot over 200 miles north and then back. With the development of birch bark canoes, coming and going got much easier and faster, prehistoric families paddled up to Mackinac to enjoy the fresh summers. They planted gardens along the shores of the lakes, and then went off on trading expeditions, returning in the fall to harvest their crops. In spring and fall they supplemented their agricultural life by fishing and storing food for winter. This pattern of life continued for thousands of years until the Europeans arrived in the early 1600's.

Europeans arrived in much larger sailing vessels and immediately discovered the problems of docking a boat with a substantial draft in the shallow, shoreline waters. They soon invented the Mackinaw boat, a shallow draft sailing vessel with a removable centerboard so it could be

dragged up onto the shore. These boats were small and could be managed by just two men. They became the workboats of the Straits.

The first Europeans were the French, who came to harvest the fur and ship the products to Quebec via the French, Ottawa and St. Lawrence Rivers. The timing of daily life centered around the comings and goings of fur trade boats, which in turn centered on the timing of the melting of ice in the spring and freeze-up in the fall. The English and then the Americans supplanted the French but the fur trade persisted until the 1840's. Then fishing became the economic engine of the Straits, another water-based lifestyle.

In the 1880's the railroads arrived, coming from the south to Mackinaw City and coming from the west to St. Ignace. The water gap between these two towns created the need for different types of boats. The railroads built large ferries to carry rail cars across the Straits, between Mackinaw City and St Ignace. Wanting even more profits from their investment the railroads also partnered to build the Grand Hotel as a tourist destination. This created the need for passenger ferries as well. Today's ferryboats are the offspring of those first passenger ferries. In the peak of summer three ferry lines spew forth an arriving and departing ferry every 15 minutes. Kayakers beware!

In addition to local boat traffic, the Straits have long been a passageway for long-distance shipping. Starting just after the Blackhawk War, in the 1830's, massive numbers of people and goods moved from the east coast to Chicago by boat. Soon lighthouses were popping up to orient this flood of shipping. Today international shipping still passes daily through the Straits. Products vary by season with winter transport of salt, spring and summer transport of the building materials of cement, limestone and iron ore, and fall transport of the foodstuffs grown in the Midwest.

On top of the continued Great Lakes shipping, we now add recreational boating. Long distance vacation cruises, day trip fishing outings, and kayaking are enjoyed by a large group of hearty descendants of those first canoers of 9,000 years ago.

Northern Michigan's Beautiful and Historic Inland Route, by Matthew J. Friday

The Inland Route is a series of interconnected lakes and rivers at the tip of the mitt. With Cheboygan as a starting point, the route travels down the river and into Mullett Lake, connecting with Indian River and sailing through Burt Lake, then into the Crooked River and Crooked Lake. It touches the communities of Cheboygan, Mullett Lake Village, Aloha, Topinabee, Indian River, Burt Lake, Alanson, Ponshevaing, Oden, and Conway. In days past, a quick voyage by land from Conway or Oden (typically train) brought travelers to Bay View, Petoskey and finally the Little Traverse Bay.

In its earliest days, the Inland Route was of pivotal importance to Native Americans, and later, European fur traders. Native Americans used the Inland Route to move back and forth between communities and to trade with each other. The mouth of the Cheboygan River was of particular use to Ottawa and Chippewa Indians who met there to trade. In 1778, British trader Samuel Robertson was the first European to live for any period of time in what would become Cheboygan. He spent two winters here trading with the local natives. Other permanent Indian settlements existed along the route, including the mouth of the river at Mullett Lake, and along the southwestern portion of Mullett Lake, Indian Point in Burt Lake, and others.

Still, portions of the waterway were only of use to the very smallest craft. The mouth of the Cheboygan River was shallow due to a large sand bar as it spilled into Lake Huron. Moreover, the rapids just a mile downriver were a great hazard to would-be travelers as well. In fact, most of the Cheboygan River was only passable for a canoe, and it is probably because of this that we get the name "Cheboygan;" it likely derives from the Anishinaabe (Ojibwa) *zhiibaa'onan*, meaning a channel or passage for a canoe.

But times were changing. In 1844 the first sawmill was built in Cheboygan, constructed by Alexander McLeod, at the present location of Great Lakes Tissue Company. The next spring an employee of his, Jacob Sammons, built the first house in Cheboygan a few hundred yards up the river.

In order to best utilize the power of the river for his sawmill, McLeod and his brother Ronald built a dam at the Cheboygan rapids in 1846. Still, the river was essentially impossible to navigate for a vessel of any considerable size. But as Cheboygan's potential to become a major lumbering community was gradually realized, locals decided to make improvements to what would become their major artery. In 1869, the Cheboygan Slack Water Navigation Company completed a canal and lock at the rapids measuring eighty feet long and eighteen feet wide with a lift of nine feet. Beginning in the early 1870s, dredging work began; this included clearing out the mouth and widening portions of the river. In 1877 the Sturgeon River, which emptied into the Indian River, created a large sand bar in the latter. To prevent this from happening again in the future the Sturgeon was rerouted and diverted to empty directly into Burt Lake. Major dredging efforts would continue along the route into the twentieth century, all with the goal of utilizing its potential for commerce.

But there were other areas of the Inland Route that needed improvement as well. At Indian River, where the river meets Burt Lake, another sand bar prevented navigation. Beginning in 1874 and continuing on for the next several years, the bar there was removed, making the waterway more navigable.

The Inland Route was most important for early lumber barons. They could cut trees along the route, then put their logs in the water come springtime, and then have them float downriver to any of the numerous mills along the route. Mill owners could also use the route to send supplies to their camps, and the practicality of the route allowed for the easy delivery of mail along the way. In fact, one of the main reasons the Inland Route was improved was to provide

an easy way to get mail to and from Petoskey. Without a doubt the Inland Route proved essential for the settlement and prosperity of the early north.

With the introduction of the railroads beginning in the early 1880s, however, the Inland Route took on a less essential role. But with the influx of people to the area the industry had made possible, another took its place along the Inland Route waters: tourism. Travelers came from all over Michigan and the United States to experience the natural beauty and fresh air of northern Michigan. Pleasure cruises on the Inland Route became a popular way to relax, see the natural sites, and relax at any number of the resorts along the route. In many lumbering communities new accommodations catering to travelers sprouted up, and other settlements were created to especially accommodate vacationers' needs. As one place along the Inland Route was described, "It is an unnatural paradise, and the people are such as would naturally assemble at such a place before being supplied permanently with wings."

Numerous companies were created to bring those seeking relaxation the respite they deserved. Passenger boats frequently left from Cheboygan at a dock on the west side of the Cheboygan River just south of what is today the Lincoln Avenue Bridge. From here voyagers could sail the entire route, or stop off at any one of nearly a dozen resort communities. Ships such as the *Ida L* and *Ida L II*, *Topinabee*, *Northland*, and *Buckeye Belle*, to name a few, steamed along the route. Ships were owned by individual companies such as the Inland Navigation Company, New Inland Route, Liebner-Davis Line, or by some of the individual resorts along the way. At nearly all of the stops along the voyage, passengers could disembark, have a bite to eat, dance, relax, and spend a night taking a break from their otherwise busy lives. Major stopping-off points were Mullett Lake, Topinabee, Indian River, Burt Lake, and Alanson. Back in Cheboygan, vacationers wanting to cross the Straits could complete a scenic trip of the north by taking a cruise from the mouth of the river to Bois Blanc Island, Mackinac Island, or even St. Ignace.

The Inland Route flourished until about 1920. In the face of rapid depopulation of the area, and the increased use of rail travel, boat traffic diminished. As the area continued to suffer economically, fewer and fewer people traveled the Inland Route. But despite the decline of the steamers which frequented the route, individuals soon began to take to the water.

Today, thousands of boats every year make the journey to and from Cheboygan along the Inland Route. Boaters can still stop off at places all along the way, from the comfort and warmth of the Hackmatack Inn to the quaint downtown of Indian River to the beautiful riverfront of Alanson. Unsurpassed for natural beauty and "up north" hospitality, the Inland Route as relevant today as it has ever been.