

May 31, 1999

Hello All,

The weekend of July 15 for the family picnic is fine with us.

We got back from Wellston early this afternoon. We did take our customary trip on the Manistee River and it was as beautiful as ever. The boulders along the banks weren't as extensive as I remembered. There were still lots of places to park the canoe and get out and walk around. And I did see a posting that explained a big project to stabilize the banks to stop erosion so the bottom doesn't fill up with silt. It said that it has been happening since the logging days. The posting mentioned planting trees, but nothing of hauling in boulders. It said that the silt will destroy habitat for certain species of fish, and if the fish go, so will the birds that feed on them. OK, OK, maybe they know what they are doing.

The weather was perfect. We've had good luck in this regard on our many trips. A calm, sunny day is needed. A breeze out of the west would force us to paddle, and that is something we prefer to avoid. The Manistee is a big river, from 60-100 feet wide, but the current is strong enough that you zip right along without paddling. There are obstacles to steer around, but it is so wide there is always plenty of room to get by. There are no rapids. The excitement comes from the surroundings.

At the beginning of the trip, just below Tippy Dam, the river is shallow with a gravel bottom, and here is where we see the most fish. They are all over, so thick that in places they were lined side-by-side up in rows. Most are about 12" long, some are longer. I wish I knew what kind they were. Some had a lateral stripe.

A lot of logs were floated down this river some time in the past, and you can still see a lot of them jutting out of the banks at all angles. Maybe they sunk to the bottom and got buried, then were exposed when the river changed course. What makes me think the river changed course is that once in while we see a big tree stump in the middle of the river, and it is upright - just as if that is where it grew.

There are stretches of the river where the valley walls rise close to the river or where the brush is thick along the banks, but there are miles of riverbank that is 6 feet or less high, and level, dry and fairly clear beyond - good for picnicking and camping. There are always a few fishermen and campers along the way, but there are no cottages at all and no developed campgrounds in sight from the river. At one place, there were about 8 tents lined up in a row and 2 guys sitting around a fire. I yelled "Where is everybody?" and they said they'd gone to the Kozy Korner (near Wellston) for breakfast. He said he'd taken about 5 trips in his motor boat to haul all the equipment in. I guess that means it was a long walk to the cars.

Yes, power boats are allowed on the river, and we saw 4 or 5 of them on this trip. We didn't see any other canoes this time, which is unusual. Fortunately, there are more challenging rivers in the area.

There was a family of about 8 kids and adults who looked Vietnamese, and we have seen larger groups of them on other trips. Seems peculiar to run into them out in the middle of the Michigan wilderness.

We saw swallows nesting in holes in the banks. I had been afraid that rolling all those rocks down the banks would drive them away, but there seems to be more of them than ever. They are NOT cliff swallows, according to our book. There are only 2 kinds of swallows that nest in holes in the banks: bank swallows and rough-winged swallows. We think they looked most like rough-winged swallows. We did see cliff swallows, but not until the end of the trip. Their mud nests were attached to the underside of the bridge we pass under just before we get out. The nests are about as big as a grapefruit, with a round entrance hole. The only place I have ever seen nests

like these was on the Rio Grande, on a canoe trip I took around 1980 when I was living in New Orleans.

The bridge is on Highbridge Road, but it is not very high at all. The bridge the road was named after was up the river a quarter of a mile, and it apparently got washed away. I'm sorry I don't know more of the history. What's left of it is huge concrete abutments going up both banks, and the banks are high. I don't know what they were for, but there are also about 30 posts standing up about 8 feet out of the water along the north bank. As we were floating by Saturday morning, Carol pointed out a nice round woodpecker hole near the top of one of them, and just then a Purple Martin stuck his head out. It was a while before I realized that was what it was, but I am sure of it. They looked and sounded like I remember. It must have been a small colony, because there weren't many holes. I didn't see more than 3 flying around. The next morning, I hiked back to the spot to get another look and came face to face with a mink. It was the size of a small cat, brown with a white belly.

That canoe trip was about the extent of our outdoor adventure this weekend. Sunday afternoon we went into Manistee - a 17-mile drive - and saw "Notting Hill" in the old movie theater. It was good, lots of laughs. Romantic. I cried, Carol didn't.

So how did you spend your Memorial Day weekend?

Steve