

Canterbury Tours
Mackinac Island ~ 2006



The Grand Hotel.

MACKINAC ISLAND ~ 2006

Saturday, September 23

It's a soupy foggy morning and I'm glad to follow another car around the bypass. It takes an hour to reach the Highcrest Shopping Center. We park and I try to attach the steering wheel lock to the accelerator, but the lock is too stiff. I figure no crook is going to check if the bar is really locked, so leave it in place. Remind me to show it some WD40 when we get home.

"Sit anywhere." I try to open the overhead compartment and finally determine it is locked. One of our party tells me "It is for the life jackets." We settle about half way back on the right side. There are two empty seats in front of us. Four people failed to make the trip. We attach our name tags. "Oh, so you are Jan."

Dave's tour assistant, Janet, orders us some strong coffee and sticky buns. The bus is comfortable, but has no mesh baskets on the seat in front, and there is no place to put anything. Lick those fingers, then Janet offers wet-wipes. Didn't like the taste of my fingers anyway. Janet has a pretty smile and laughs a lot. It is 7:00am. We roll.

The fog is clearing. We head out on Riverside and cross the interstate. Strange, I thought we would turn north on I90. A car is in the ditch, victim of the fog. Dave explains that one of our tour members forgot his tie. Ugh? We just drove into a subdivision for that? Then a guy comes trotting down the road with a complete wardrobe over his back. Must be a big tie. Back to the interstate and north.

Visibility is less than a quarter mile. Mike our driver, an ex-cop, is not bothered by the fog which finally clears around 8:30am. In fact throughout the trip, nothing bothers him. Not wind or rain or impossibly tight turns and back-ups. He does a superb job. Makes one feel *safe*. At the entrance to the bus is a sign which proclaims it a "kneeling bus." I ask Mike what is that? He tells me that the bus rides on an air dampening system. When the air is 'let out' the front drops allowing one to step in or out of the bus without high steps (ladder). The older buses had a hydraulic step which moved out, but there were too many accidents when it failed to deploy, or dropped.

We enter the 'windy city'. When we visit Chicago, I always drive downtown but now, as a passenger, I'm seeing things I've never seen before. "Look at the architecture on that church Jan." I count the floors on a skyscraper and reckon the top disappears in the clouds at around 500ft, and yet it is 62°F at 9:00am.

We pass Gary, Indiana.....



[Boardwalk at Saugatuck.](#)



At St. Joseph we turn north on I196 leaving I94. This is new territory for us. I try using my Poquet computer, but there is not enough light for the screen.

The music is pleasant. If it is Michigan, advance your watches to Eastern Time.

Mike has a little problem at Saugatuck, he exits too soon. Back up out of the forest. Turn around. Nicely done! Try the next one? Then Saugatuck. Must be a nightmare. Impossibly narrow streets. But we made it to lunch at Corral Gables.

Is it breezy Jan?

Here we start our gastronomic orgy. A three course lunch; salad, chicken Kiev and strawberry cheesecake.

Saugatuck is an art colony, but we had little time to visit any shops.

Our route took us through downtown Grand Rapids, home to Gerald Ford. At 2:51pm it is 70°F



Lake front restaurants in Saugatuck.



Corral Gables.

Dave plans ahead. “Who does *not* want whitefish?” Quite a few hands wave.

It continues to drizzle. “Jan, did you see that sign. The main part just rough boards. On top a full size bed with imitation linens and a cut out of a moose. Did you get the name? Bed, board and moose.”

Another road sign. Why is “11 mile road 1 mile ahead?”

“Look, there’s three deer.”

“And a pumpkin patch.”

We peered ahead. “That pickup is tilted at a weird angle and I can’t see the driver.” It was on a tilted flatbed, quite an optical illusion.

Gas is \$2.19. A car turns in front of us without warning. Mike hits the brakes and we feel the wheels lock up. The car never knows what could have hit him. We roll into Traverse Bay. A sign announces 'Elks welcome.' "Hey, that's us."

The Holiday Inn overlooks Grand Traverse Bay. Our keys, in named envelopes, are waiting in the front lobby. I rescue the carry on bag with gin. We don't have much time before supper, so I go back to retrieve our suitcase. It is on a cart, buried one layer down. I can't get it. A slightly built young lady starts hauling the cart.

I comment that she has my suitcase. "I have two floors to unload, three and four, which are you?"

"Three." I reply.

"OK, we start there." Says she. She earned a good tip.

We reload the bus for dinner at 6:15pm and drove about 12 miles to The Cove in Leland. The tables are arranged around the windows. We both enjoy the White Fish Special, lightly breaded and fried, and then there was that Key Lime pie. Back home by 10:00pm.

Sunday, September 24

The bar is the local watering hole. Several people ask if we heard "That party in the parking lot from 2-3am."

"Not Jan or I."

Our tour has a private room for breakfast, and what a breakfast. Served to our tables. Linens and all.

On the bus by 8:30am. A member of the HI staff comes on board to give us Cherry Chocolate Truffles in large silver boxes. A nice touch!

Traverse is a popular resort area. The waves are huge on the lake. It is raining. Flags are horizontal. The flowers still look good so they can not have had a frost. We pass the 'Hard Luck Café' and 'Blue Goat Restaurant' as we ride up the peninsula past wooded lots, multimillion dollar homes and piers. Sandy beaches, lifts for jet skis, and wooden decks with chairs to sit on the beach.

Dave, "This is such a beautiful unblemished area, but the town we are now passing is called 'Acne', what a shame!"

"Jan, we should have brought Ponchos." We pass through rolling grassy fields, orchards and grapes.

In Charlevoix we visit an area designed by Earl Young during the depression. The homes are all built using large field stones. Most unusual!

“I need to walk.” So we left the bus, killing time before lunch. There were the usual tourist shops, but then I am not a ‘shopper.’

It is cold. “Let’s find a coffee shop.” We do, it is the ‘Wooly Bugger.’ A good Cappuccino.



Field Stones.

Lunch at the Weathervane located on an inlet from Lake Michigan. It has a humpty back roof, and nice window seats overlooking the water way. We are eating way too much....Chicken salad, banana bread, and mixed fruit.



The Weathervane.

The Lake at Charlevoix.

The Mackinac Bridge, completed in 1957, crosses the Straits from Mackinac to St. Ignace. We watch an interesting video about it’s construction.

There is standing water in the fields, and a golf course every ten miles, but at last the sky is clearing. A little blue and a glint of gold.



We cross Big Mac, the bridge, at 5 miles long and 200ft above the water, it is the third longest suspension bridge in the world. We learn later that it sways in the wind.

Our trusty steed.



We leave the bus and wait for the ferry, a catamaran. The ride over is 15min at 35mph, so about 9 miles. It is cool and breezy, but the sun feels good.

I take lots of pictures from the upper deck. You can't miss the Grand Hotel, its long white veranda parallel to the shore line and half way up the hill.

The Cat'

Big Mac.

There are no motor vehicles on the island so we wait for a horse taxi, well actually two horses and driver. Twelve of us climb into the open carriage. Strange they are equipped with two way radio and audio. At the Grand I try to step out of the carriage on the left side, but am restrained. Another buggy is passing us and I would have been hoof meat. Anyway I get that perfect photo just as the horse relieves itself.



The Grand Hotel.

Up a flight of stairs, and back to the Terrace Room for orientation. Each of us receives a little colored book, which is a passport or proof that we are guests. Visitors must pay \$12 to enter the Grand. The stay includes all meals. A full breakfast and five-course dinner are included daily. So we must show our passport to get a meal ticket.

This level is the Parlor Floor, designated with a "P" not for parking. It is hard to describe how huge is the area. The carpet is black with a geranium pattern in red and deep green. Lots of small rooms off to the side. We are encouraged to use these for relaxation, card games or social gatherings.

"Don't spend time in your bedrooms, you would not do that at home."



Taxi.



Built in 1887 it has 385 guest rooms with no two decorated the same. At 660 feet, Grand Hotel's Front Porch is the world's longest. There are about 80 'window' boxes of geraniums, all perfect. I want that yellow canna!

We peer down to the swimming pool in the gardens below, which takes 500,000 gallons of water to fill. Named for actress Esther Williams, who starred in the 1949 movie *This Time for Keeps*, filmed at the hotel. *Somewhere in Time*, starring Christopher Reeve, Jane Seymour and Christopher Plummer, was filmed at Grand Hotel in 1979. Five U.S. Presidents have visited Grand Hotel: Harry Truman, John Kennedy, Gerald Ford, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton.



Down to the Lobby level shops. Nice and expensive!

We want a tour of the island. Carriage rides are \$80/hr private, booked at the Grand or \$19 from the quay.

[Esther Williams Pool.](#)



Front Porch.



Main Hall ~ Parlor Level.



Audubon Wine Bar.



Art Gallery.

At 6:00pm you turn into a pumpkin if you are not wearing finery. For men, a suit and tie, ladies a dress. I actually purchased a suit for this trip.

A short rest then time to dress. My first tie in ten years. But I can still tie!

Jan is acting strange. "Do you see anything wrong with me."

"No, you look great."



Our four posters.

Jan had bought a new pair of black shoes, but managed to pick up one left foot from an old pair, pointed toe, and one new with squared toe. Worse yet the heels were at different heights.

"No one will see that," and they did not.

The restaurant is huge, seating 750 and is almost full. A surprise for this time of year.

"Yes, we will have a bottle of wine." I order Riesling for Jan's taste, a little sweet for mine. A five course dinner should be recorded. I order lamb chops which comes with couscous, ugh! The chops are excellent but I do not like CC. Lobster bisque soup and a fillet for Jan. We both top off with Creme Brólé.

"Can you dance Jan?" We did. Perhaps the first time in 20 years.

We roll in to four poster beds and bright flowered wall paper.

Monday, September 25



Sunrise is at 7:00am. We woke to a creaking floor above. The Grand is entirely built of wood. Our breakfast table is by the window. We present our Passports then fill out cards with name and room number. No tipping. The crockery is green and gold, geranium flowered inside the rim. We are served. Orange juice, cereal, quiche with mushrooms, diced peppers, and pepper sauce.

Closed carriage.

The sky is streaky blue with fast moving clouds from the north. We took a closed carriage from the Grand to town, \$4.25, and picked up tour tickets.



Twelve person carriage, Doc & Jacob.

After about a mile we reach a shopping complex and transfer to a carriage for 35 people, drawn by three horses, the 'Oreos', brown, white and brown. They are Belgian drafts purchased from the Amish who dock their tails to prevent them from being caught in machinery. Horse teams stay together with their drivers for the season. Mostly college students who may have no 'horse' experience.



Don't sit in the front row of a horse drawn carriage..... Off to tour the island. Our driver, Amanda, praises Doc and chides Jacob the lazy horse. From the pier we make our way back past the Grand, stopping frequently for the horses to rest on the steep hills. They like the rain.



Steam powered fire pump.

A week of training, and then they are turned loose. They must clean the stable and wash the horses twice a day. Our second driver, Kaco has been here four months. One of her horses is a 'nester'. He pulls all the hay out of his feeding box to lie on it. She joins the air force as a mechanic next week.

The students work 70-90hr/wk and get one day off. They tell us they tell their cars to gideyup.

Thirty-five person carriage, the Oreos.

In winter there is 10 -14ft of snow. They don't plow, but just pack it down. There are 200 residents. They must stock up with food. If goods are flown in, it costs 50c/lb. At noon a siren sounds.

We enter the second National Forest created after Yellowstone. We see the only Tamarac tree on the island. The cone must be burned to release its seeds. Since lightning is unlikely and fire is discouraged, this may be the only one on the island. Arch Rock is worth a picture as is the beach.



Arch Rock.



The Beach.



We left the tour at Ft. Mackinac, a stockade behind this façade and walked down a steep path into town.

Here we walked first to the east then all the way to the west end of town. The bar with a tin ceiling was great for lunch.

Sun...rain....sun.

Fort Mackinac.

Jan can't find a nice sweater. The shops are OK, but not great.

We walk back to the Grand. Our Passports are checked at the entrance. The topiary of a horse and carriage is worth a shot. The serpentine pool is heated from Memorial Day to Labor Day, but not now. We don't even consider swimming.



Topiary.



Time for dinner again. Jan eats pork and me a galloping prime rib and good wine.

We never did figure out why there was a towel on the floor between the beds. “What did we do Jan?” Weird!

A lady in our group lost her camera, but it was soon returned.

[Downtown Mackinac.](#)



[Rocking on the porch.](#)

Tuesday, September 26.

The weather is nice. Clear and sunny and the wind has dropped. We have time to kill so sit in a rocker on the porch taking in the sun. Boats go by throwing up huge plumes of water. There must be 100 boxes of geraniums. The pillars are wood, plastered to look like stone.

Nylon filaments are stretched between the pillars to keep birds out.

“Do you want that sweater Jan?”

So we go down to the shops.

“Where are you from?”

“Romania. Yes, I am a student. I go home in four days.”



[Plumes.](#)



Cat back.

Lunch at the Bistro on the Lobby Level Floor was decidedly Jamaican. Iron legged tables overlooking the gardens.

We sit some more on the veranda.
“Jan, we should go.”

Bell hop. “It will be 15 minutes before a taxi arrives.”

Oops. Yesterday a group missed the boat.

“Jan, lets walk!”

Left foot, left foot.

I walk fast but it only takes 12 min to reach the dock. Guess I over reacted. Fifteen minutes later the taxi rolls in.

“Do you want an ice cream?”

We are in line for the next catamaran. Jan. “There is another line over there. Those are all our group.”

It turns out we were in the wrong line. This boat is for Mackinac City not St. Ignace. Left foot, left foot.... At least I see our cases on the trolley. “Let’s sit up top.” It is a rough and windy fifteen minutes with white caps. Not a good choice.



Goodbye Mackinac.

The bus is waiting. We drive along the north shore of Lake Michigan. Through sand dunes and scrub. The Lake has white caps. Dave announces, “Look to your left and you will see Gary Indiana.” I don’t think so, that’s 300 miles. The trees change to a mix of evergreens and deciduous with patches of brilliant fall colors but in other places nothing has changed.

A sign announces “Discover shipwrecks in a glass bottom boat.” Why would anyone want to do that?

We leave the highway at Escanaba and drive past the Terrace Bay Inn where we will be staying. Mike needs to turn the bus around. We pull into an unkempt parking lot in front of a disused factory. A wit observes “This must be the Escanaba Shopping Mall.”

The Inn is on three levels perched on a gentle slope like stacked boxes so that where they touch there are two floors. Janet calls out our names and hands out envelopes containing a room key. We are last on the bus and no key. "I think we have a problem?" She produces an unnamed envelope.

Dave uses a walker and needs help ascending the steps into the hotel.

Our room overlooks the bay. Close to shore is a carpet of golden reeds. We have just thirty minutes to change and leave for dinner at 6:46pm. It is a mile down the road to The Log Cabin. We have some time to spare and take a diversion to view multi-million dollar homes in a subdivision overlooking the lake.

At the bar I chat with a guy brandishing an expensive digital camera. He tells me about software capable of correcting parallax.

The entrée, chicken something, was pre-ordered and quite good.

I bury the gin bottle with a final martini. Time to head home.

Wednesday, September 27

I woke at 5:00am to the sound of running water and thought we had a plumbing problem, but no, just torrential rain. A shame because we were denied seeing the sun rise over the lake.

After a continental breakfast, we continue driving down the west side of the lake still in the state of Michigan. Here is one of the few places where if you look east you see Wisconsin (Door County.)

A lady at the back of the bus circulates a gift card and envelope to which we contribute for the driver.

We learn that in 1871 the town of Peshtigo was destroyed by fire, the same day as the Great Fire in Chicago. More people died in Peshtigo.

As we enter Wisconsin, we re-set our watches to Central Time and pull in to the new Lambeau Field in Green Bay. An impressive stadium, but we are not able to take a guided tour, and everything but the main entrance hall is closed to us.

We stop briefly at the American Club in Kohler, a resort hotel reminiscent of an old English Hotel then on to Black Wolfe Run for lunch. We have a private room overlooking a golf course and dine on fruit salad, chateaubriand and apple pie.

It has stopped raining and we make good time to Rockford pulling in to the Highcrest Shopping Centre at 4:15pm.

We have dined well on this trip and both gained a disgusting two and a half pounds.

