

SPUR VISITS

Mackinac Island

Need a lift? Hail a surrey or a saddle horse on this summer paradise that has banned automobiles for 100 years.

WRITTEN BY ANNE LANG • PHOTOGRAPHED BY CAROL KAELOSON



Bob Giles drives Jay and Janet Stingel's Friesians down a Mackinac Island road uncluttered by cars. The Dutch-bred geldings are "wonderful animals to work with," he says, "and they love to show off."

Stepping off the ferry at Mackinac Island on a glorious June morning, I am instantly hit with a poignant rush of memories.

It has been 17 years since I last visited this quaint resort spot that majestically holds court above Lake Huron in the frigid straits that divide Michigan's upper and lower peninsulas. During that summer of 1979, the island community was all aflutter because a Universal film crew was on location shooting scenes for *Somewhere in Time* featuring Jane Seymour and Christopher Reeve.

A newlywed at the time, I all but forgot my sweet husband as I stood—along with dozens of other sighing female tourists—100 feet from the spot where the dashing star of *Superman* fame lounged in a canvas chair. I don't know how long I lingered on that hilltop, but I do know that if Reeve had even thought to glance our way and flash a smile, we probably would have fainted en masse.

Now I am back. No longer a 20-something with stars in her eyes, I shrewdly scan the bustling port area and beyond, certain to find it changed. The meadow that once was cluttered with camera cables and klieg lights has of course long ago resumed its pastoral state, *Somewhere in Time* having been eternally preserved for home video distribution. But Mackinac Island, bless its heart, looks exactly the same as ever.

Which is the whole point, after all.

Touted as one of the Midwest's crown jewels, Mackinac (pronounced *Mack-uh-naw*) Island is a living turn-of-the-century time capsule, an inveterate magnet to history buffs, nature fans and horse lovers alike. Originally dubbed by the Chippewa Indians as Michilimackinac, which means "great turtle," the island lies just east of St. Ignace at the lowest tip of Michigan's Upper Peninsula and northeast of Mackinaw City at the highest tip of the Lower Peninsula. The five-mile-long "Mighty Mac" suspension bridge links the state's two halves.

Tradition abounds on historic Mackinac, most significantly with the 100-year-old ban of motorized vehicles. The ban was established in 1898 when the first automobile to rattle and bang down Huron Street so badly frightened Mackinac's carriage horses that the village council immediately voted to prohibit cars altogether. Happily, the law has endured, further strengthened by park commission sanctions. Island transportation remains strictly limited to saddle horses, horse-drawn carriages and bicycles.

It's an equine lover's paradise—though admittedly not all of the nearly one million visitors to the island each year are enthralled with horses. But most folks soon adjust to the inevitable byproducts of the animals'

ubiquitous presence (local street sweepers' diligent efforts notwithstanding).

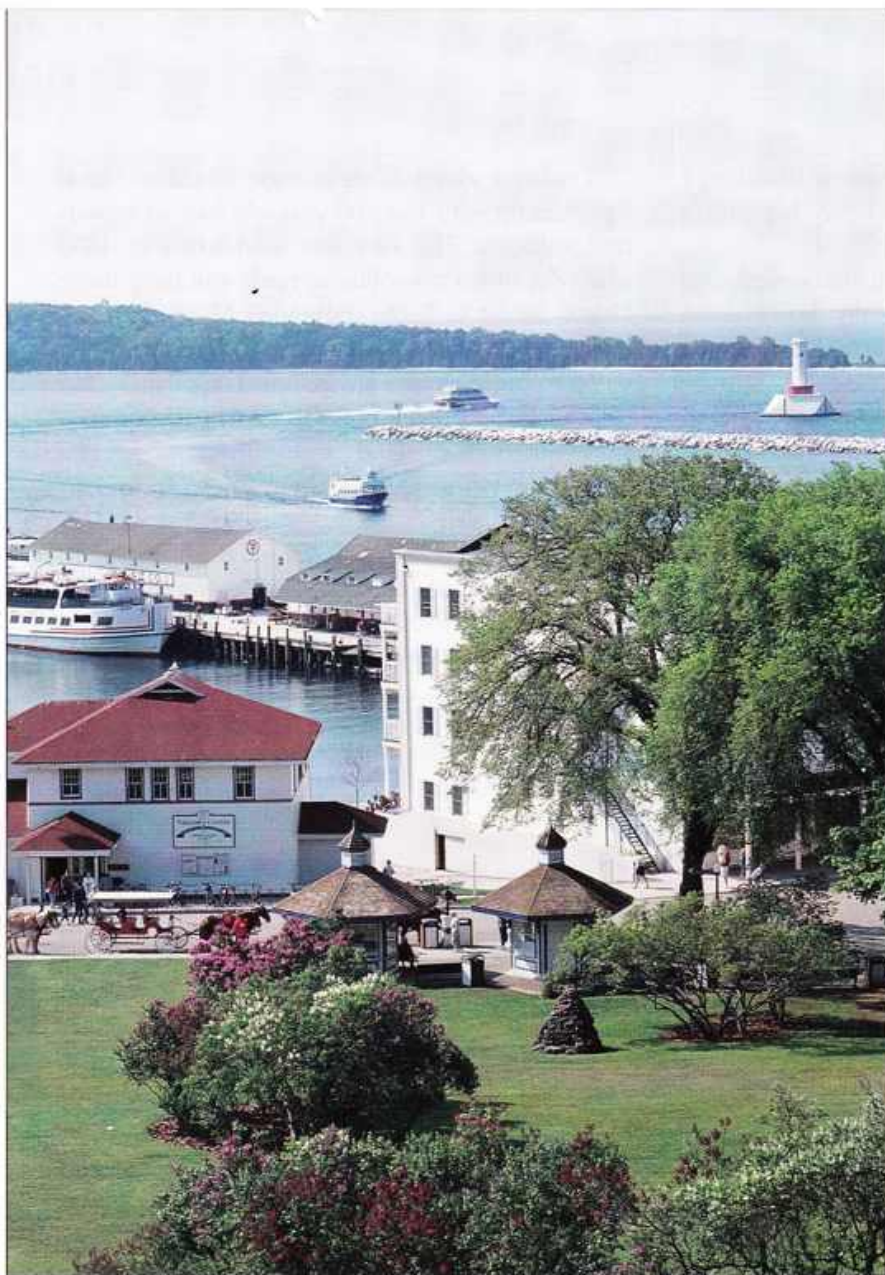
Most of the elegant hotels, charming boarding houses and sprawling summer homes that were built just prior to the turn of the century still command the island's East and West Bluffs, and the dazzling array of their Victorian architecture is the first looming image that meets a ferry passenger's eye. The



Pete LaPin pulls up his Hackney pair at the Grand Hotel, where he oversees the stable and the carriage and sleigh museum.

second image? Horses—horses everywhere. Along with photographer Carol Kaelson, I am here to discover what and who keep Mackinac's awesome equine machine running smoothly from April to November ... and to meet the hearty few who stick it out through northern Michigan's take-no-prisoners winter.

From the docks, a college-age porter with a bicycle cart hauls our luggage up one short block to our home for the week, the Cloghaun bed and breakfast. Like most B&Bs on the island and elsewhere, the Cloghaun is reminiscent of your Great-Aunt Gertrude's house: antique furniture, front-porch rocking chairs, eyelet comforters, fine china, Tiffany lamps and whisper-thin walls. The scant time we manage to spend there is quietly restful and exquisitely hospitable. Mornings, we awake to the brisk clip-clop of carriage traffic and the



Shops, hotels and elegant summer homes hug the Mackinac harbor. The only wheels allowed on the streets belong to carriages and bicycles.

ting-ting of bicycle bells.

One of the Cloghaun's many pleasant features is its close proximity to all three of Mackinac's riding stables, where saddle horses are rented by the hour. We start at Chambers Stable with an evening ride after closing hours—affording us the luxury of deserted trails and minimal horse traffic through town. Our guide is Denise Romano, a charismatic 14-year Mackinac veteran who takes us on a three-hour marathon trek all over the island, culminating in a perfectly timed, breathtaking vista from Sunset Rock.

Romano's tour also includes the more remote trails where few tourists tread. One of those is the lovely Tranquil Bluff at the little-traveled northern end of the island; another is Swamp Trail, where some of the island's private horse owners have set 2-foot jumps at regular intervals. Since tourists are relegated to Western saddles, our romp down "The Swamp" is interesting, to say the least.

(Unfortunately, liability clauses dictate that visitors cannot ride in English saddles, even if they bring

ENGLISH, PLEASE

For prospective visitors who might wish to dodge the Western rule by bringing their own horses to the island for a short-term stay, we offer a tip: Plan ahead, way ahead. Start calling Mackinac's saddle-horse businesses during the winter to obtain the names and phone numbers of private residents who might be willing to let you stable on their property. The problem is, said property is at such a premium on Mackinac that even most longtime horse-owning locals and summer folks have extremely limited turnout and/or stall space. And you might as well forget about coming in July and August when the island's equine population is bursting at the seams.

Second, know that while there are no quarantine restrictions for incoming horses, there are the usual health-paper requirements (Coggins, etc.) common to most areas of the country, particularly for interstate horses. Third, be prepared to pay substantially more than mainland prices to house and feed not only your horse but yourself as well. Last, as Alison Cram cautions: "You wouldn't want to bring a really fine-boned horse to the island; it's too rocky. And a high-strung animal may not adjust well to the overall environment."

For more information and pertinent phone numbers, contact the Mackinac Island Chamber of Commerce at (906) 847-6418.

their own—unless they're on privately owned horses. Western tack is one of the few exceptions to Mackinac's pervasive tone of Victorian propriety.)

Early the next morning we set out with a guide from Jack's Livery, whose owners—the Gough family—also own Cindy's, the third island saddle-horse establishment. This time we stick to a mostly mainstream route that meanders down a few of the bustling village streets (not to worry: these horses are all shock-proof), up past the stately Grand Hotel and West Bluff cottages and into the labyrinth of trails through the woods. Typically, your guide will lead you home past Fort Mackinac, Mission Point and the East Bluff cottages, providing a comprehensive offering of primary island scenery.

Another ride or two highlights our next few days on the island, but so do a couple of carriage tours—the second-best way (equestrians are biased) to view much of Mackinac's splendor. Visitors have several choices here, including the Jack's Livery drive-it-yourself carriages pulled by seasoned horses who know their routes well and will keep even the most inexperienced yahoo out of trouble.

Carol and I opt for the deluxe three-horse-hitch excursion from Mackinac Island Carriage Tours, the island's main livery. This tour is nearly two hours long and passes by or stops at most of the hot spots, such as the Surrey Hill carriage museum and blacksmith shop, Arch Rock, Fort Mackinac, the Grand Hotel, island cemeteries, the Governor's Mansion, Skull Cave, the limestone quarry where British occupiers mined stone to build the big fort during the American Revolution, and several in-town landmarks.

Again, this is an excellent orientation for first-time visitors. But for those who don't wish to ride in the big wagons that carry 35, 20 or 16 passengers, private, guided taxis can be rented from Jack's Livery or from Joe Plaza's Arrowhead Carriages,



FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: Dale Gough, a Mackinac native, is co-owner of Jack's Livery. Leanne Brodeur chairs the Mackinac horse show and organizes a summer lesson program for island children. Dr. Bill Chambers and son Brad, proprietors of Mackinac Island Carriage Tours, pause in front of Brigadoon House, owned by Jay and Janet Stingel. Alison Cram, here with one of the Grand Hotel horses, gives riding clinics and guest-teaches at Black Forest Hall, a mainland Michigan college with a renowned equestrian program.

whose fleet queues up beneath Fort Mackinac hill at Marquette Park.

But Carol and I use mostly foot power on our quest to see what goes on behind the horse scenes on Mackinac. We begin with a visit to the Big Barns, where horses owned by Mackinac Island Carriage Tours are stabled or turned out. If the horse is the backbone of Mackinac Island, then Carriage Tours is the backbone of its horse ranks. The island's summer equine population usually reaches about 550, and Carriage Tours horses (including the Chambers Riding Stable string) account for the bulk of these. The company's record number of horses harnessed in one day is 287.

We find farrier Ben Mosley busy trimming a 1,700-pound Belgian's immense hind hoof. Mosley stays constantly busy shoeing Carriage Tours horses and the Grand Hotel teams, while three or four other blacksmiths keep the remainder of the island's horses in footwear. Mosley also shoes the 20-some horses who stay on the island all winter to pull sleighs, taxis and freight drays.

In the nearby carriage shop are longtime islanders Vic Bone, Jerry Horn and Andy Hall, who keep Carriage Tours' 100-plus vehicles and miles of harness in tip-top condition. Most carriages are replicas of historic designs such as the Studebaker Surrey. Gears for newly built carriages are shipped from out of state, but the rest of the parts are all handcrafted on the island, including the welded chassis.



One of the Mackinac Carriage Tours teams carries tourists through an island forest. The business claims the double distinction of being America's oldest livery and the world's largest horse-and-buggy livery.

Down the road at the Grand Hotel, stable manager Pete LaPin is hitching a pair of impeccable Hackneys to an equally impeccable Vis-A-Vis Brewster carriage built in 1890. LaPin has spent 14 seasons on Mackinac, where his seven-day-a-week summer schedule includes 13-hour days and supervision of a seven-horse stable, three-person staff and the Grand Hotel's carriage and sleigh museum. There, more than a dozen restored classic models (all circa 1900) are on display.

LaPin reveals one of the major reasons old-time Mackinac's prices might seem downright futuristic compared to other summer resorts. Not surprisingly, the cost to ferry items of any kind to the island is inflated due to the labor involved. And that makes horsekeeping all the more expensive as well. Two examples: Manure removal is \$4 a yard. And the freight

charge for one hay bale is about \$1.65—on top of the regular \$2 cost of the bale. Tack on the labor charge for hauling the bales from the docks to their respective island destinations, and you've got some pretty pricey timothy. Consequently, most horse owners supplement their hay rations with feed cubes, says LaPin.

Owner of Mackinac Carriage Tours, Dr. Bill Chambers, 65, is part of an island family legacy that began in 1830, when Chambers' paternal great-grandfather built a house on the corner of Market and Cadotte. (Chambers and his siblings were born in the house.) Ten years later, Chambers' maternal great-grandfather started one of Mackinac's first liverys, and the business has been steadfastly carried through subsequent generations.

"The first time our parents put my brothers, my sister and me into a car, we all got sick because we were so used to horse-drawn carriages," Chambers laughingly recalls.

A year-rounder since 1984, Chambers is the island's only large-animal vet, but most routine care for

horses outside the Carriage Tours herd is handled by veterinarians who travel from the mainland. That's not to say that "Dr. Bill," as he's affectionately known, won't step in when emergencies arise.

Much like pioneer children, youngsters who live on Mackinac year-round (as well as summer cottagers' children) have taken for granted the inclusion of horses in everyday island life. Second-generation island native Trish Martin, now 40 and co-owner with her mother of Bogan Lane Inn, remembers learning to ride "by guess and by golly, without saddles, at a dead gallop through the woods."

Martin is part owner of an Arabian whom she keeps at Donnybrook, the East Bluff summer home of New Yorkers Candace and Jay Dunnigan. She takes care of Candy's horse and her own in a small stable yard near the house. Martin describes Mackinac's annual one-day horse show, held in August, as "an informal mix-

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ture of Western and English pleasure classes, games and a little jumping. It's all pretty low-key and fun. Eight years ago the governor's wife showed up for the show in full hunt regalia, and everyone just stared!"

But such formality, once *de rigueur* on the island, is a lost element for which other natives such as Alison Cram still yearn. Now the owner of La Belle Provence gift shop, in the 1960s Cram was one of the Midwest's most accomplished dressage and hunter riders. Nationally, she's perhaps best remembered for riding retired racing champion Kelso in a dressage exhibition at Saratoga.

"I'd love to see some of the so-called 'elite' riding disciplines return to Mackinac," admits Cram, who often kicks back and rides the trails with Martin and Dunnigan. "Dressage, cross country and formal

carriage driving are traditions that should be particularly preserved in a place like this, even if it's only on horse-show day."


Leanne Brodeur is another island native who, like Martin and others, learned to ride "by the seat of my pants. I jumped bareback for years before I got my first saddle." She later refined her style at places such as Huntley Horse Center, Meredith Manor and Morven Park but faithfully returned to Mackinac to operate the Village Blacksmith gift shop—which she inherited from her parents.

Lornie Porter, who with husband Bill owns a 25-room year-round home and private stable located right next to the Grand Hotel, remembers learning to ride saddle seat and hunt seat on Mackinac as a child. "We were taught by some real masters, including Ralph Power and Keith Ryan," she says. "Everything was much more formal then. I'm sad to see the elegance disappear, although I realize it's far safer to put tourists in

Western saddles."

The last day Carol and I spend on Mackinac is capped by a ride in a pre-1880 Brewster carriage pulled by a quartet of magnificent matched black Friesians. The four-in-hand team is owned by Kentucky residents Jay and Janet Stingel, who summer at their Brigadoon House—located (with stables) on Huron Street, overlooking the harbor.

Late in the afternoon, as our ferry chugs away from the dock, I bid a silent farewell to all the stalwart island horses and compassionate horse handlers we've encountered. Still, even after nearly a week on Mackinac, I am at a loss to succinctly define the sense of enchantment that draws so many people to its shores—some for a lifetime. Then I remember the words of Mackinac native Dale Gough, co-owner of Jack's Livery:

"Mackinac just gets in your blood, you see. I love the island, I love the horses, and that's all I've ever needed to feel alive." 

CONTRIBUTORS

Washington, D.C.-based **Stephen May**, author of "All Degas' Horses," page 34, is an independent scholar who writes about art, culture and sports for publications as diverse as *Western Horseman* and *Smithsonian Magazine*. "Degas," he says, "offered me a wonderful opportunity to combine my love of art and horses. It was a special treat to write about a gifted artist who never stopped trying to improve his equestrian images." A native of Rochester, New York, May is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Wesleyan University and Georgetown Law School. He has practiced law, traveled extensively and served in several governmental positions.



Stephen May

Photographer **Carol Kaelson** and writer **Anne Lang** have teamed up on many SPUR assignments in recent years—ranging from polo with Tommy Lee Jones to racing at Oaklawn Park. They rate this issue's visit to Mackinac Island (see "SPUR Visits Mackinac Island," page 56) among their favorites. The two share a strong work ethic as well as "an appreciation for life's absurdities," says Lang. Kaelson,

a former Saddlebred owner and native Kansan, recently transferred her freelance business to Los Angeles, California, from Dallas, Texas, where her career included working as the still photographer on the popular PBS series "Wishbone." Transplanted Michigander Lang writes for several national equine publications from her home in Austin, Texas, where she also shows her Quarter Horse hunter, Southern Comfort.

Margaret Worrall's interest in Chincoteague (see "Mystique of Chincoteague," page 62) began when she read Marguerite Henry's books as a child. A country girl all her life, Worrall recently purchased an old waterman's cottage on Chincoteague. She and her husband, steeplechase trainer Doug Worrall, live in Glyndon, Maryland. The owner of retired steeplechase champion Von Cadek, Worrall is secretary (and the only woman member in 100 years) of the Maryland Hunt Cup Association and a member of the World Timber Championship committee. A regular contributor to SPUR and other publications, she is the author of three books—*The History of the Green Spring Valley Hunt Club*, *Calvert School: The First Century* and *100 Runnings of the Maryland Hunt Cup*.