

CAMPING

Autumn is 'a quieter, simpler time' to camp out

BY NANCY SUNDSTROM
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Veteran camper Rich Townley remembers a time in the not too distant past when he and his wife, Wanda, would pull into a campground anytime from mid-September to mid-November and feel like they were the only ones in the place.

That's changed dramatically, said Townley, who knows the national campground circuit on familiar terms. Not only have he and Wanda given up their home in favor of living out of their RV year-round, they also work for Southeast Publications, which puts together directories and guides for campgrounds and RV parks to give to customers.

"Across the country, but especially in Michigan, more and more people have discovered that the fall is a great time to camp, with so many more advantages than the summer," said Townley, who says there isn't a park in the Traverse City region at which he hasn't been a guest. "The word has been out for a few years now, and so we're really seeing more activity every fall."

Townley said the list of advantages starts with off-season rates, which are considerably cheaper than those for the high-demand months of July and August, along with



Record-Eagle/John L. Russell

Campers gather around the fire on an autumn day at Maple Grove Campground in Lake City.

more options for sites, and a general ambiance of less noise, commotion and people.

"The complexion of these places radically changes, because instead of them being dominated by younger kids or families with young children, you have an older demographic, primarily seniors who don't have to worry about getting kids back to school and the like," said Townley. "As opposed to the beaches and the pools in the summer, the

average older campground guest comes to Traverse City to see the colors, visit the wineries and casinos, and stay at a place that's a little quieter, cooler, comfortable and certainly less expensive than it is in the fall.

"There's really not a downside for this group, and that's why seniors dominate the clientele at this time of year."

Debbie White, the office manager at Holiday Park & Campground in Traverse City,

echoes Townley's observations, particularly about the average age of and the quality of camp experience sought by autumn campers.

"There's no doubt about it, when the seasons change, so do the campers and the whole flavor of what they're here for," said White. "We close in early November, but in the two months leading up to that, people are here to see the fall colors, shop, take in the area nightlife, tour the wineries

and the orchards, or maybe fish or go to the Red Wings Training Camp. They know it's a quieter time, it's cooler and there's off-season rates, so there are a lot of factors to motivate people to visit in the fall."

Parks that offer cabins are an extra enticement for fall visitors. The Traverse City South KOA, located 15 minutes south of Traverse City on m-37 in Buckley, offers five cabins and two lodges in addition to traditional options.

"We see a lot of tents in the fall, but the lodges sleep six and have plumbing and a kitchen, and the cabins are clean, warm and comfortable with a bathhouse right by, so we have a good number of options for campers," said Manager/Owner Cathy Kuebler. "Like most other parks, we see a different kind of crowd in the fall, and every year, we see more people wanting to come because it's just a less crowded, quieter, simpler time."

"We're packed to the gills all through the summer, so I get the feeling that everyone, including us, is ready for a break and things to settle down a bit. When they do and after we close for the season, we take off and head to Florida for the winter. Then spring rolls around and we come back up, energized and ready to do it all over again."

Campgrounds around region

ALANSON

Camp Petosega 33 sites. 347-6536.
Crooked River RV Park 17 sites. 548-5534.

ATLANTA

Big Oaks 27 sites. (989) 785-4251.
Clear Lake State Park 200 sites. Call (989) 785-4388 or (800) PARKS.
Mackinaw State Forest: Avery Lake 16 sites. (989) 785-4251; **Jackson Lake** 18 sites. (989) 785-4251.

BEAR LAKE

Hopkins Memorial Park 30 sites. 864-3281.
Kampvilla RV Park 92 sites. 864-3757.

BEAVER ISLAND

Wagner Campground 22 sites. 448-2505. (Chamber of Commerce.)
St. James Township Campground 12 sites. 448-2505. (Chamber of Commerce.)

BENZONIA

Homestead Resort: 6 sites. 882-4163 or (800) 686-4163.
Timberline Campground 189 sites. 882-9548.
Vacation Trailer Park 100 sites. 882-5101.

BOYNE CITY

Young State Park 240 sites. 582-7523.

BUCKLEY

Traverse City KOA 119 sites, 5 cabins and 2 lodges. 269-3203.

CADILLAC

Birchwood Resort and Campground 33 sites. 775-9101.
Cadillac KOA 50 sites. 825-2012.
Camp Cadillac 115 sites. 775-9724.
Hemlock 15 sites. 775-8539.
Mitchell State Park 215 sites. 775-7911.
Pere Marquette State Forest, Long Lake 18 sites. 824-3591.
Peterson Bridge South 20 sites. 775-8539.

CEDAR

Leelanau Pines 182 sites, 228-5742.

CHARLEVOIX

Fisherman's Island State Park 81 sites. 547-6641 or (800) 44-PARKS.

CHEBOYGAN

Cheboygan State Park 76 sites. 627-2811 or (800) 44-PARKS.
Waterways Campground 50 sites. 627-7066.

EAST JORDAN

East Jordan Tourist Park 100 sites. 536-2561.

EASTPORT

Barnes Park 66 sites. 599-2712.

ELK RAPIDS

Honcho Rest Campground 50 sites. 264-8548.

ELLSWORTH

Wieland's Whistling Pines 14 sites. 544-6348.

EMPIRE

Sleepy Bear Campground 220 sites. 326-5566.

FIFE LAKE

Pere Marquette State Forest: Spring Lake 32 sites. 824-3591.