

RESTAURANT GUIDE

Dock and dine: Eating out by boat

BY SHERRI & GRAYDON
DECAMP

Special to the Record-Eagle

A few times each summer, just the right weather comes along and beckons us to head out from Elk Rapids in our boat for dinner in some distant port.

We have peak memories of cruising over to Suttons Bay or Northport, browsing the shops, enjoying a leisurely dinner at Hattie's or on the porch at Stubbs and then watching the full moon rise over the bow as we pass north of Old Mission on the way home.

The reason we need just the right weather is that our yacht is only a 17-footer, and before setting out for a destination below the horizon, we want to see a flat-water forecast and no thunderheads closer than, say, Omaha.

This is the sort of adventure that all this water is meant for, and it is something anyone with a boat can enjoy, for northern Lower Michigan has plenty of dock-and-dine restaurants where the dress is as casual as the burgers are juicy and the drinks well-iced.

One is the Dockside in Clam River, on the east shore of Torch Lake. A vacationer's dream, it's relaxed in style, blessed with a convivial crowd of wannabe beachcombers and has sandwiches and burgers, famous on the Chain of Lakes, that come with awesome fries.

Accessible by boat from Elk, Torch, Clam, Skegemog and Bellaire Lakes, the



THE CONNOISSEUR UP NORTH

Dockside and its dock are at your left hand as you enter the Clam River channel from Torch Lake. (Be cautious! The channel is as narrow as it is busy, and the current can be wicked, so if you're coming from upriver, don't even think about a downstream landing. On busy weekends, you may have to hold offshore to wait for dock space to open up.)

The Landings at Ironton on Lake Charlevoix is another popular skippers' destination. It gets its name from the cable-drawn ferry next door, which has been carrying traffic across the lake's South Arm since Hemingway was a pup.

Much swept up in recent years, The Landings nonetheless remains a classic waterfront beer-and-a-burger spot where anything dressier than shorts, tee and Topsiders draws curious glances.

There's often a crowd, and care is required in maneuvering in the docking areas, especially with larger boats.

From the main body of



Record-Eagle/Elizabeth Conley

There is no dock at Scott's Harbor Grill, but the nearby marina has transient space.

Lake Charlevoix, bear southeast into the South Arm and you'll find The Landings to starboard just before the channel narrows sharply at the ferry.

Technically speaking, you could get there from anywhere on the Great Lakes, since Lake Charlevoix is accessible directly from Lake Michigan via the Pine River and Round Lake. For the little guys like us, however, it's a fun destination from Boyne City (11 miles), Charlevoix (five miles) or East Jordan (eight miles). And it's a good place to end a day begun at the nearby public launch ramp.

Somewhat less casual, perhaps, but still not exactly coat-and-tie territory, is Dudley's Deck, the outdoor dining venue at Stafford's Pier in Harbor Springs. It's one of Stafford's stable of fine restaurants.

Fare on the deck runs to lunchtime soup and sandwiches, and by evening,

many folks head inside for dinner. The menu at the Chart Room is on the bistro side while the Pointer Room's is downright upscale. The latter got its name from The Pointer, the

lovingly restored launch still moored outside that once ferried cottagers to tony Harbor Point across the bay.

Another favorite dinner

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