

Chapter 11: Michigan Nature Association

The MNA is a non-profit organization that works to acquire and protect natural areas that contain examples of Michigan endangered and threatened plants and habitats.

The group started in 1951 and has expanded over time. They now protect over 175 sanctuaries across Michigan, with many in Upper Michigan.

You can go to their website and pick an area of the UP, and it will list the sanctuaries and give a description with photos and directions to get there. They are not usually marked with big signage.

The sanctuaries can be a couple acres or several hundred acres. They all have some unique features or plant life of their own. These beautiful natural areas have been provided by private donors for everyone to enjoy.

Getting stoned before or during your visit to one of these spots will probably enhance your visit.

These are not party spots to bring your beer, garbage, or noise. There are plenty of other spots in the UP where you could do that type of partying without offending anyone.

Many times I have traveled around the UP and didn't even know I was near one of these spots. It may not be worth traveling long distances, but if they are right on your way, why not? Go on a free natural adventure. They vary, but there are some gems in there.



Jacob's Falls © 2022 Jessica Struzik

Chapter 12: Waterfalls

The UP is famous for all its waterfalls. If you are looking for something like Niagara Falls you are going to be disappointed, but Upper Michigan has over 200 small to mid sized waterfalls.

The highest concentration of waterfalls is in the western part of the UP going from Munising area and then west. One notable exception to this is the largest waterfall in the UP, Tahquamenon Falls in Paradise, MI, which is NE of Newberry.

To me, a true waterfall has to have some air under it. In other words, the effect of water “falling” off a ledge passing through air. If a waterfall is a steep descent through a narrow area of rocks, this doesn't quite cut it in my book.

Once again it depends on what you are looking for. There are waterfalls that you can practically drive right up to, and others that require a walk or ATV ride miles back in the woods. The falls that are easy to access will have the most human traffic. I remember taking an elderly relative who was wheelchair bound down to Bond Falls. They have a paved trail that leads to the back of the falls. He was a photography buff so he had a great time. There are many falls you can see if you have limited mobility or time.

I have found the best experiences I have had with falls is when you are alone or with your own group of friends..

To get away from people at waterfalls isn't that hard. One thing that helps is to visit on a weekday. Another is visiting at less than peak times of year.

In the early spring when the water is melting it can create some strong flows, turning mild waterfalls into raging torrents. There is a lot less human traffic but keep in mind back road travel can be problematic at that time. The falls that are off paved roads on the way to other attractions are always going to be the busiest. Some falls are not long hikes in, but get a lot less human traffic because they are in a section of the UP that doesn't get a lot of traffic for other reasons.

Probably the most common way to attempt to avoid people is to hike into the falls. The further the hike, or the harder the hike, the less likely you will find people there.

I had a fantasy bucket list that I would go to a waterfall while stoned and stand naked under the falling water. Believe it or not, there are still places in the UP where you can actually do something like this. With a little research I found a small - medium sized waterfall which fit the criteria I described earlier. I liked it because it seemed to fall off a ledge and was tall enough to stand under. The hike back was around half a mile and not difficult.

So here is a trick a lot of locals won't tell you. Pretty much all these waterfalls are trout streams. If you're going to be back there anyway, why not take a fishing pole. In this case I had taken a small telescoping ultra lite rod. My "tackle box" consisted of a small box a little bigger than a cigarette box which contained lures, bait, and hooks.

As usual, I was appropriately dressed for bugs, including a hat and bug spray. However, on this day I hit one of those early fall sweet spots for bugs. Meaning there were practically no bothersome bugs of any kind unless you got down into some deep shade.. It was exceptionally nice for early fall with high in the low mid 80's. The lake and river water was still close to summer temperatures.

I tried fishing above and below the falls and after an hour and a half managed to land one small brook trout around 8" which I left in the stream. There wasn't any other human traffic during this time so I decided to take a walk under the falls. I won't tell you if I had clothes on, but I did wear my old hiking shoes for traction. I ducked through the falls to get behind them. The first thing I noticed was the water was very cold. Most waterfalls are on trout streams or at least cool water streams. Any delusion you may have about frolicking under a tropical waterfall is quickly washed away by UP reality. The experience would be more like jumping into lake superior on a hot day. Or maybe like running out of a hot sauna and jumping into a snowbank. By the way, all of these activities are more fun when you're stoned.

This particular falls had a space where you could stand or hunker down behind the falls in places. Being tucked behind a waterfall felt

kind of surreal to me. It reminded me of one of the many adventure movies where the plot included a cave behind a waterfall which led to treasure or an undiscovered underground civilization. In this case there was no cave so I made one last attempt at soaking under the falls before making it back to shore. I went to retrieve my trout. While fishing I had noticed a sunny spot near the falls where some hiker or fisherman had made a campfire a few months previous. They probably made the campfire in this sunny area to lessen mosquitoes. Making a fire and cooking the trout in some fashion seemed like an intriguing idea. But I decided to move on to new adventures. I had brought a small thermal bag with ice pack and snacks, so I bagged the trout and put it in the chilled bag for later. Through timing and location I discovered there are still places in the UP where you can have a special waterfall experience.

There are many areas that do not have as big an overall variety of waterfalls as the UP. Granted, many of these are small to mid sized falls, but it's still easy to want to go look at every waterfall in the area. Don't turn your trip into a waterfall tour. Unless you have a super fascination with them, I would recommend you check out one or two falls on any given trip.

Waterfalls in Winter

In winter waterfalls can develop an entirely unique look caused by ice formations that form around the edges due to moving and splashing water. Throw in snow and sub zero temps, and you can get some interesting icicles, ice shelves, ice pushes, and other ice formations. Especially on smaller falls. In some cases, a small shell of ice will form around the outside of falls all the way down to the bottom. This will give the illusion that the falls are frozen in place.

My brother used to own some land sw of Houghton. A small stream originated out of a swampy area on his property. The spring was only a couple feet wide by maybe a foot deep, but it never seemed to dry up. It ran across his land and then briefly through a neighbor's land before spilling 30' over a ledge into Lake Superior. One winter my nephew and I traveled through waist deep snow to see what the frozen falls would look like. The falls were encased in ice all the way down. I

could hear the waterfall still gurgling down underneath somewhere. This frozen column extended all the way down to the bottom and was quite an amazing structure. Just to the right of where the spring spilled into the lake, there is a spot in the bluff that seems to get hit with the full force of the wind. In an area about 20' x 10' there is a spot worn smooth right to the ground which is vegetation and rock. After trudging through the 3' snow to get here it's quite an odd variation in the scenery and a welcome spot to take a break. This stream and waterfall is unknown because it's too short and small to be on anybody's map. Another example of little treasures you can still find.

Waterfalls can be worth looking at in the winter, but I don't think I would make that the focus of your winter trip. If you're up here for other reasons they are worth checking out on the way.

Here are a few of the falls I have enjoyed for one reason or another.

Places to Explore

Dead River Falls (Marquette) About a 1 Mile Walk

Superior Falls (Montreal River)

Manganese Falls (Copper Harbor)

Memorial Falls (Munising)

Munising Falls (Munising)

Tahquamenon Falls (Paradise)

Canyon Falls (South of L'Anse)

Laughing Whitefish Falls (Northwest Alger County)

Twin Falls Park (Munising) features TWO waterfalls

Chicagon Falls (Iron County)

Miners Falls (Munising)

Elliot Falls (Munising)

Rock River Falls (Deerton)

Grand Island Ice Caves (near Munising)