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NEXT

BY ROBERT EARLE HOWELLS


WEEKEND

INSTANT ADVENTURES 49 WILD ROADS 54

INSTANT ADVENTURES

MICHIGAN

Hike Midwest Highlands


 The Porcupine Mountains in the rugged Upper Peninsula are home to Michigan's highest unobstructed viewpoint, one of its highest lakes, and for the first two weeks of October, its most stunningly vibrant forests. To see all of the state's unsung highlights, hike into Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park from the Summit Peak parking lot off South Boundary Road. Hoof it 2.5 miles to one of three cabins on Mirror Lake (at 1,531 feet, among the highest in Michigan) amid forests of maple, aspen, and birch turning every which hue. The cabins are furnished, but you boil lake water to drink and use an outdoor privy (\$60; mi.gov/parkies). Follow Little Carp River Trail for seven miles to see the river tumble in a series of waterfalls. Or make the 2.5-mile hike from the cabin up to the Summit Peak observation tower—just a tick under 2,000 feet—from which you can see Lake Superior and pretty much the whole state.

Michigan's
Porcupine Wilderness



Practicing rope etiquette in red-rock Utah


COLORADO
Take Your Pooch to Wilderness Boot Camp

 Jennifer McCarthy is the Cesar Millan of the hiking set. Whether you've got a problem pup or just want your best friend to behave a bit better on the trail, a weekend at her retreat—at 8,000 feet in the Rockies high above Boulder—is a good bet. The boot camp clinic is pretty intense: eight-hour days of dog and owner training. “The owners are a lot harder than the dogs,” McCarthy says. She teaches myriad fancy tricks and deals with difficult problems like aggression, but even your average friendly hiking mutt can benefit: “We do a trail-ready course that meets City of Boulder leash law,” she says. “Your dog can only hike off-leash in Boulder if it's trained to come back to you if it sees an animal. Since we have cats and deer on the ranch and bears and lynx in the mountains, they learn how to deal with distractions.” Dogs and owners bunk right in McCarthy's house for the weekend (\$2,999 for one dog; jmdogtraining.com).

MONTANA
Fly-Fish the Bighorn—in style

 “Fall is a magic time on the Bighorn River,” says Nick Forrester of Forrester's Bighorn River Resort. The inn owner and former biologist isn't talking about the color in the cottonwoods, alders, and chokecherries lining the river in south-central Montana. He's extolling the emergence of tricos, a kind of mayfly, which bait 20-inch brownies into rising for a feast. Forrester and his chef wife, Francine, run the handcrafted, rustic-luxe, Orvis-certified lodge perched on the Bighorn's uppermost stretch. The place may ooze machismo—cigar loft, wing shooting trips, bison and pheasant on the menu—but it does out plenty of creature comforts, like blueberry pancakes and organic coffee. If weather happens to skunk a day of float-fishing, relax by a huge river-rock fireplace or journey 30 miles up to Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (\$1,400 all-inclusive for two days' fishing, three nights' lodging; forrestersbighorn.com).

MISSOURI
Dive Deep Earth

 “You can only dive so much murky water until you've got to go someplace where you can see,” says Missouri dive instructor Doug Goergens. (That's right: Missouri.) It doesn't get any clearer than the waters of Bonne Terre Mine, in the Ozark foothills an hour south of St. Louis. Bonne Terre is a decommissioned lead mine filled with 58-degree water, purified by deep layers of limestone above. Deep-earth diving, Goergens calls it. “We've never had a bad day of diving,” he says. (Conditions, of course, are exactly the same year-round.) “But every dive is an adventure.” Goergens guides divers in a sequential series of 50-plus tours, each revealing different chambers of the labyrinth—all illuminated by more than half a million watts of lighting. You'll see locomotives and sidecars, immense archways, and caverns 300 feet high. “They chased all these veins of ore, so the geography seems random and inconsistent.” But always dazzling. Between dives, stay in the mine's converted 1909 Depot B&B (\$340 for two nights and four dives; 2dive.com).

WISCONSIN
Bike the Milky Way

 Anywhere else in the country, pairing road cycling with dairy products would seem, well, uncomfortable. But in Wisconsin, the two mesh seamlessly. Case in point: the 24-mile, crushed-limestone Sugar River State Trail from Brodhead to New Glarus, which traverses pastures, forests, covered bridges, and Holstein territory (wisdairy.com/GetMooving). The main point of interest is the Maple Leaf Cheese and Chocolate Haus, which professes no fewer than 88 types of cheese and 25 flavors of fudge. Eventually, the trail leads to New Glarus Woods State Park, 431 acres of oak and maple woodlands and two restored prairies (\$14 for a campsite; dnr.wi.gov/org/land/parks/specific/ngwoods). And remember, research suggests that chocolate milk makes an ideal postworkout recovery drink. Prosit!

ILLINOIS
Float the Vermilion

 Illinois has exactly one National Wild & Scenic River: the Middle Fork of the Vermilion in the eastern part of the state. And by definition, nothing man-made can interfere with its flow. Instead, you're fringed by mixed forests of oak and cottonwood interspersed with stands of pine and some swallow-pocked bluffs. Kingfishers

are thick on the river, as are ducks and honkers. Stop by Kickapoo Landing in Kickapoo State Park, where they'll outfit you with a canoe and shuttle you to Potomac. Then it's a 12-mile float and a short walk to the Bunker Hill campground, followed by an eight-mile paddle the next day (\$48; kickapoolanding.com). Tod Satterthwaite, who runs the landing, suggests you bookend the trip by taking in the Friday-night bluegrass concert in Kickapoo State Park and sampling some corn-fed heifer at the nearby Possum Trot. “Around here,” he says, “the local flavor is beef.”

