

Exploring ice caves along Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore near Munising is always an adventure: "You never know how the ice will form, and it often changes," observed Aaron Peterson, a writer and photographer based in the Upper Peninsula. Hiawatha National Forest, known for its colorful sandstone cliffs and sea caves, is another top spot to indulge in this scenery.



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Cold Play

BY DIANNA STAMPFLER

From pristine trails to rugged wilderness, from towering hardwoods to ice-laden waters, Michigan offers never-ending opportunities to enjoy cold-weather recreation.

SNOWSHOEING>>> It's one of the oldest recreational activities around, and it's finding new life for those looking for different ways to enjoy the majestic beauty of a Michigan winter. Many resorts now offer snowshoe rentals for youth and adults. State parks also offer a variety of hikes throughout February, including Hartwick Pines in Grayling and P.J. Hoffmaster in Muskegon. Ludington State Park offers free, guided snowshoe walks every Saturday in January — one at 3 p.m. and a "Moonlight Walk" at 7 p.m.

NORDIC WALKING>>> Europeans picked up on this fitness trend years ago, and now it has made its way to the Midwest. Nordic walking — or ski walking — uses specifically designed poles to engage

the upper body during fitness walking. The next time you take a leisurely hike along the trails and through the woods, grab a pair of poles and pick up the pace. The Kal-Haven Trail between Kalamazoo and South Haven, and the Waterloo-Pinckney Recreation Hiking Trail near Ann Arbor are ideal for this type of activity. The Michigan Legacy Art Park at Crystal Mountain Resort in Thompsonville and the trails on Mackinac Island are also suitable for Nordic walking.

TOBOGGANING>>> For more than 70 years, families have made Echo Valley in Kalamazoo part of their winter tradition. Feel the rush of wind in your face as you travel at speeds up to 60 mph down a quarter-mile ice-run on a custom-molded



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY ISTOCKPHOTO.COM (TOP);
COURTESY MICHIGAN SNOWSPORTS INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION (BOTTOM)

toboggan. An outdoor ice-skating rink and tubing hill are also available.

ICE CLIMBING>>> The sandstone bluffs of the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore near Munising have attracted ice climbers since the 1970s. As water seeps from the rocks, it forms into spectacular frozen blue curtains, while the waterfalls freeze into magnificent ice pillars. These overhangs, some measuring up to 200 feet, provide myriad crystal formations that

challenge even the most skilled climber, as waves from Lake Superior crash along the shoreline below. It's said that Munising, which hosts the Michigan Ice Fest each year, has the best ice climbing in the Midwest.

YURT CAMPING>>> Feeling rustic? Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park has just completed its first yurt — a sturdy, tent-like structure measuring 16 feet in diameter. Originating in central Asia,

the yurt is without the comforts of running water and electricity but is equipped with bunks that sleep four and stoves for both cooking and heating. Construction of additional yurts is expected in early 2007. Mount Bohemia also offers yurt camping, including a group sleepover party in February.

RAFTING>>> Paddle under the glow of the moon and stars with Jordan Valley Outfitters in East Jordan during one of their guided, winter rafting dinner trips. Enjoy appetizers, dinner and dessert along the banks of the Jordan River.

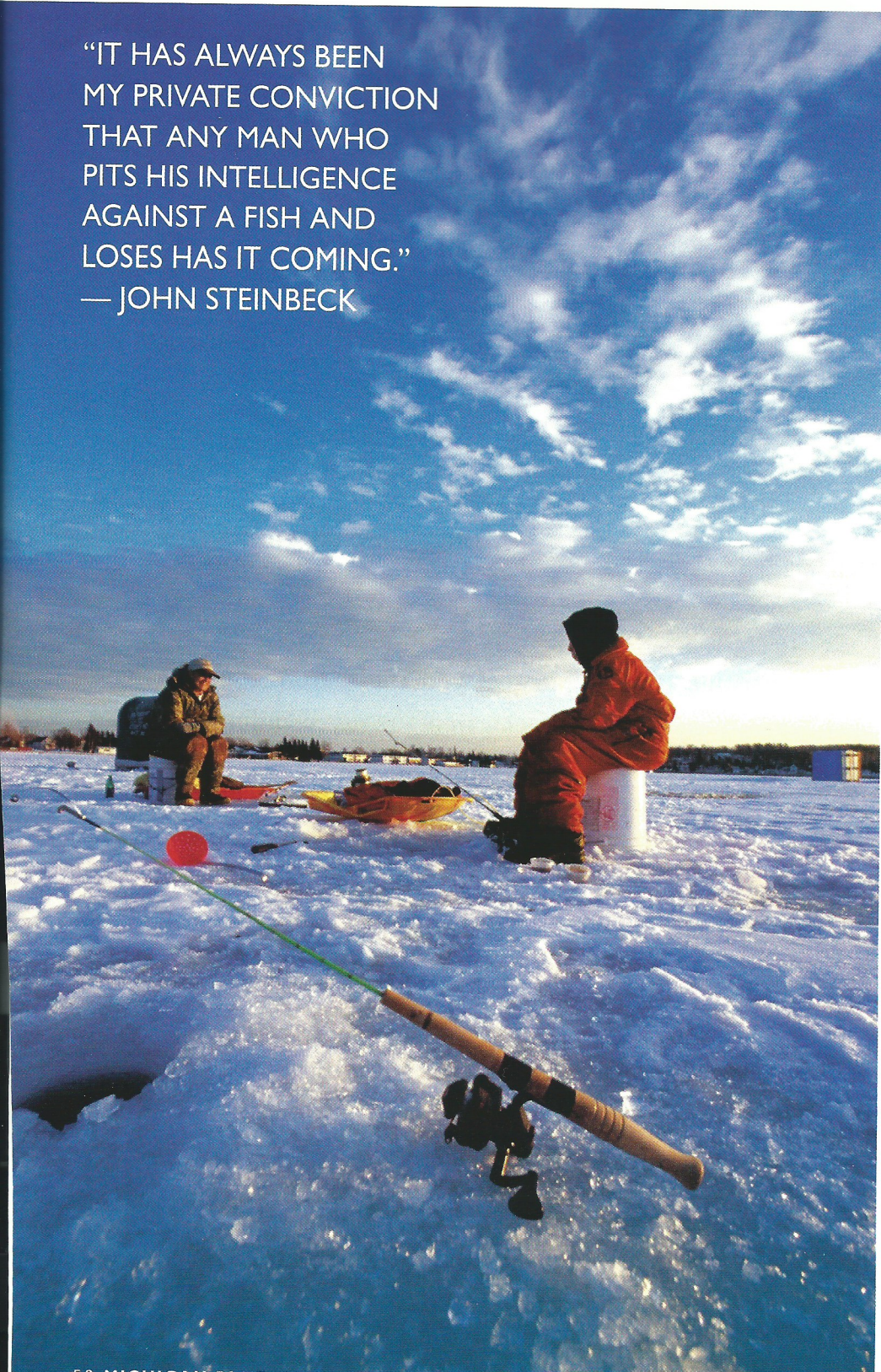
Those looking for added adventure can strap on snowshoes to explore the snow-covered forest. Float down icy waters beneath a canopy of snow-covered evergreens that surrounds the Sturgeon River during narrated tours with Big Bear Adventures in Indian River.

LUGING>>> Go for the gold at Muskegon Winter Sports Park. The facilities were built with help from Olympic luge medalist Mark Grimmette, who calls Muskegon his hometown. Take the 500-foot track to reach speeds of about 15 mph; the 720-foot run clocks in at speeds of 35 mph. This is one of only three Olympic-style luge runs in the country. The park also offers ice skating and cross-country skiing, with lighted trails for evening excursions.

ICE SKATING>>> Strap on your skates, head out to a frozen pond, stream or man-made rink, and bring back childhood memories. Rosa Parks Circle in downtown Grand Rapids, created by internationally known artist Maya Lin, is generally open to skaters through March. In downtown Detroit, Hart Plaza (named in honor of Sen. Philip A. Hart) also offers ice skating. If you'd rather watch than skate, head to Port Huron in February for the Edith Schoenrock Figure Skating Competition at McMorran Place.

ICE BOATING>>> Ice boating was the fastest way man could travel before airplanes. Depending on wind and water conditions, these boats can reach up to 100 mph as they glide across the frozen waterways. The Grand Traverse Ice Yacht Club holds regattas around the state, including many on the lakes and bays near Traverse City and at White Birch Lodge in nearby Elk Rapids.

"IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN
MY PRIVATE CONVICTION
THAT ANY MAN WHO
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AGAINST A FISH AND
LOSES HAS IT COMING."
— JOHN STEINBECK





Left: Depending on wind and water conditions, ice boats can reach speeds of 100 mph as they glide across frozen waterways. The Grand Traverse Ice Yacht Club holds regattas across the state.

Center: Michigan ski areas collectively boast more than 200 chairlifts and 840 runs. The largest vertical drop in the state can be found on the Keweenaw Peninsula. Below: Frozen waterfalls near Munising can measure up to 200 feet and are noted as a top Midwest ice-climbing destination.

ICE FISHING>>> Houghton Lake is Michigan's ice fishing mecca, home to the annual Tip Up Town USA, conducted the last two weekends in January. Now in its 57th year, it's considered one of the largest winter festivals in the state.

Families looking to discover the state's great fishing opportunities are invited to take part in the DNR's Free Fishing Weekend, Feb. 16-18. For these three days, no license is required to fish Michigan's rivers, streams and lakes. It's hoped that this free weekend will help residents and visitors catch on to the exciting sport of fishing.

DOWNHILL SKIING>>> It makes sense that Michigan ranks at the top as a Midwest ski destination — after all, organized skiing originated in the Upper Peninsula town of Ishpeming, which now boasts the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame and Museum. Michigan ski areas collectively boast more than 200 chairlifts and 840 runs. The largest vertical drop in the state, measuring 900 feet, can be found at Mount Bohemia at the tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula. This year, 17 new runs are being added there in an area called the Outer Limits.

Downstate, dozens of hills offer gentle slopes for skiers of all levels. The Michigan Ski Industries Association sponsors various programs throughout the year for youth, adult and senior skiers.

TELE-SKIING>>> This variation of downhill skiing is wildly popular at Mount Bohemia in the Upper Peninsula, where

the Midwest's largest gathering of tele-skiers converges each year in mid-January. The simplest way to explain the difference is in the equipment. With regular Alpine skis, the heel and toe are clamped down with bindings. In tele-skiing, only the toe is clamped down, leaving the heel to rise up and down off the ski, allowing the skier's knee on the downhill leg to bend and dip into a kneeled stance called a "tele-mark" turn.

SNOWBOARDING>>> If you think there's something "phat" about riding a half-pipe or grinding a ledge, then you're in the right state. Michigan ski areas boast 40 terrain parks, with expansions and improvements made each year to challenge boarders of all ages and abilities. The first marketed snowboard, the Snurfer, was in-





vented by Sherman Poppen from Muskegon in 1965. Where's the best terrain park to ride that board? According to readers from Ski Magazine, Nub's Nob in Harbor Springs ranks No. 1 in North America.

CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING>>>> At Garland Resort in Lewiston and Crystal Mountain Resort in Thompsonville, try the gourmet ski feasts. Evening skiing along candle-lit trails can be found at Sleeper and Port Crescent state parks in the Thumb area. Every Saturday night throughout the winter, the 1.5-mile trail at Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park is lit with old-fashioned kerosene lanterns.

Traverse City is home to some of the best trails in the state — located in the heart of the Pere Marquette State Forest — including the Vasa Pathway. The North American Vasa ski event is held here each February.

DOGSLEDDING>>>> Who says you have to go to Alaska? Wilderness Trail Outfitters in Wetmore offers two-, four-

and six-hour tours, as well as an overnight excursion lasting up to eight days. The Wilderness Tours offer hands-on opportunities to learn how to handle a dog team. Superior Dog Sleds in Chatham, Nature's

in Paradise, Triple Creek Kennels in Munising and Double JJ Resort in Rothbury also offer dogsledding tours, packages and training.

HORSEBACK RIDING>>>> Saddle up for a leisurely horseback ride along one of the equestrian trails maintained at state or county parks. Double JJ Ranch in Rothbury offers year-round trail rides, as does Wild West Ranch in Allegan. If you prefer to sit back and relax, a tour with Thunder Bay Resort in Hillman provides just such an experience. The Elk Viewing Dinner Ride provides an up-close look at majestic bull elk from a horse-drawn carriage or sleigh. A multi-course dinner, paired with local wines, rounds out the romantic evening.

SNOWMOBILING>>>> Michigan has more than 6,000 miles of snowmobile trails, maintained and groomed by the DNR. The Upper Peninsula is a haven for sledders looking for the remotest of trails. Known as the "Snowmobile Capital of the World," Munising sees an average of 220 inches of snow each year. It's there that Grand Island Snowmobile Rentals offers excursions to Great Kingston Plains, considered (until now) to be a well-kept secret by the locals and regulars. In the Lower Peninsula, thousands head to Cadillac for the North American Snowmobile Festival, held the last weekend in January. ≈

For links to winter recreation Web sites, visit www.mibluemag.com. Dianna Stampfler is a contributing editor to Michigan BLUE.



The Elk Viewing Dinner Ride at Thunder Bay Resort provides an up-close look at majestic bull elk from a horse-drawn carriage or sleigh. Above: To learn more about snowboard parks, turn to page 62.