



DESTINATION:

MARQUETTE, MICHIGAN

Ridin' in da U.P.

EH OKAY
Downhill trails
in Michigan, eh?
You betcha.

MARQUETTE IS A SMALL COLLEGE TOWN TUCKED in the forests of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Here, roads with more than four lanes are non-existent, and "rush hour" typically involves a total of five cars at a stoplight.

Nestled on the southern shore of Lake Superior, Marquette is enveloped by glacier-hewn bluffs brimming with breathtaking views. In the fall, the area's dense woods of maple, birch and oak transform from bright green to a jaw-dropping display of fiery reds, oranges and yellows. But the terrain is more than just pretty—it's the ideal setting for almost every outdoor activity, from rock climbing and kayaking to nordic and alpine skiing.

The city of just over 20,000 people exudes an outdoorsy vibe, with a paved bike path running through the middle of town, multiple lakeside parks and four high-end bike shops. If your ideal adventure-sports destination has a dozen coffee shops or a booming aromatherapy/health spa industry, you might find Marquette a bit wanting: this place is what big-city folks like to call "quaint." That said, the quality of the restaurants, shops and hotels makes up for what the city lacks in sheer quantity.

The winters are harsh this far north, and lake-effect snow keeps the ground coated with a thick layer of white for nearly six months of the year. But what Marquette lacks in a lengthy riding season it more than makes up for in riding quality. The landscape offers diverse terrain: from rocky, rooty, gnar-strewn lines to buff, flowing ribbons of singletrack that weave through thick stands of hardwood trees.

SOUTH TRAILS: Until recently, navigating Marquette's South trails took local knowledge and a keen sense of direction. Thankfully, the Noquemanon Trail Network has been hard at work in recent years, shaping the maze of trails into four clearly marked loops. Each loop is roughly 5 miles long and mostly, if not entirely, singletrack. Navigation is made easier by color-coded trail markers. Most riders refer to the trails by their corresponding colors: Carp River loop (yellow), Morgan Creek loop (green), Mount Marquette loop (blue) and Pioneer loop (red).

There are several ways to start a ride on the South trails, but the easiest approach is to access each trail from the main trailhead parking lot; each loop cloverleaves from this point. Though each one is only a few miles long, they take an average rider 45 minutes to an hour to complete—this is technical and steep terrain.

The Mount Marquette loop is arguably the jewel of the network. If there is only time for a quick ride, this is the one to do. It features everything from swooping singletrack to stair-stepping jagged rocks that will make any rider's leg hair stand on end.



MARQUETTE MOUNTAIN: The local ski resort may only boast 600 vertical feet, but it's a steep 600, and it's no fun to push or pedal your way to the top—especially on a big bike. Fortunately, you don't have to: Marquette Mountain's chairlift makes pedaling a non-issue. That's right, there is lift-accessed riding in the Midwest. The mountain boasts 16 runs and connectors that range from insanely rough, full-on downhill trails to more XC-style descents. Be sure to check the mountain's schedule, because the lifts only run every other weekend during the season (visit marquettemountain.com, or call Quick Stop Bike Shop: 906-225-1577).

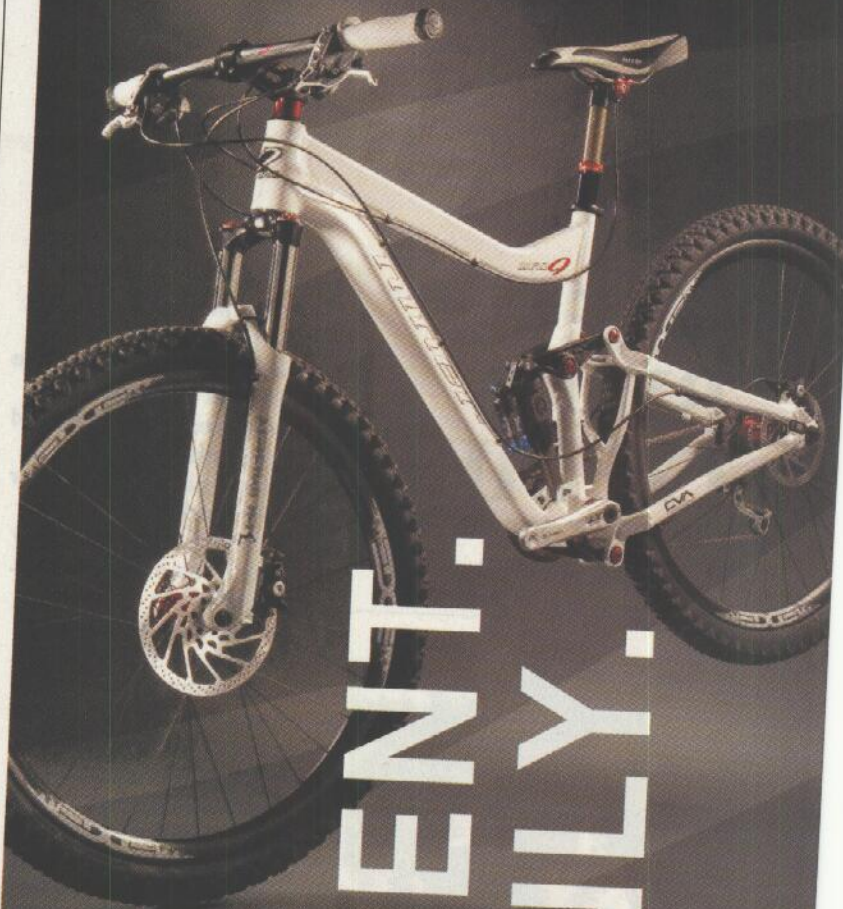
For the purebred downhill racer, the mountain offers Gypsy Road. The trail is about as close to a World Cup downhill course as the Midwest's limited vertical terrain can offer. Freeriders will be stoked on the bumpy, jumpy Plug to Lower Hemi to DTF to Bad Medicine trails. Cross-country riders with less do-or-die riding styles also have options such as Fiddlers Creek or the Easy Rider trail (currently part of the Carp River loop).

BENSON GRADE: Still not feeling challenged? Freeriders and the technically apt should check out the Benson Grade. While the area is no secret (it's part of the Pioneer loop and the end of Morgan Creek), the trails that spider-web off the top are. Most of the local shops can point you in the right direction. Longtime staples on the Grade include the Your Mom and Your Sister trails. More huck-happy trails, including Jethro Tull and Hardtail Pride, have been built in recent years. Probably the area's toughest trail is The Huckstables, which concludes with a near-20-foot natural huck. —RYAN LABAR

the inside line

- **BEST TIME TO GO:** June to October
- **PRE-RIDE FUEL:** The Sweetwater Café might have the best breakfast in town, but it's a bit pricey (906-226-7009). Third Street Bagel offers a variety of tasty and affordable bagel-based breakfast sandwiches (906-226-9809). Coffee snobs should run to Dead River Coffee (906-226-2112).
- **POST-RIDE GRUB:** Few satisfactions in life match that of the massive post-ride burrito and beer found at the Border Grill (906-228-5228). Fancy something more exotic? Visit the Thai House (906-225-5945).
- **BEER:** For local brews and fine food, go to the Vierling restaurant and brewery (906-228-3533). Stucko's Pub and Grill serves beer from large goblets that would make a king jealous, and offers better-than-average bar fare (906-226-1112).
- **SHOPS:** All of the bike shops in the Marquette area have trail maps and loads of local trail knowledge: Down Wind Sports (906-226-7112); Lakeshore Bike (906-228-7547); Quick Stop Bike Shop (906-225-1577); Sports Rack Limited (906-225-1768).
- **LODGING:** The Supor 8 is about 2 miles down the bike path from the South trails entrance, less than a mile from the Harlow Farms Connector trail, and fewer than 3 miles from Marquette Mountain (906-228-8100). Those with some extra bones to burn might enjoy the Landmark Inn for its in-house bar, restaurant and downtown location (888-752-6362).

FOR INFORMATION, MAPS, PHOTOS, VIDEOS AND GPS DATA ON THESE TRAILS AND OTHERS, LOG ON TO BTRAILS.COM.



PASSION. COMMITMENT. 29ERS ONLY.

THE BIG REVOLUTION



Niner W.F.O. 9 >>
The most capable 29er ever.
Get the details here:
www.29ermountainbikes.com