

Yurts making an impact in Campgrounds

Tucked in what Doug Barry calls Michigan's "most remote state park" is a round, roomy piece of modernized Central Asian antiquity.

The 7,000-acre Craig Lake State Park, 45 miles west of Marquette, is home to one of several yurts that have popped up at Upper Peninsula campgrounds in recent years.

Yurts have been the standard shelter for Mongolian nomads going back to the 1200s, but more modern-day campers are turning to the tent-like structure for a "one-of-a-kind experience," said Barry, the park supervisor.

The yurt at Craig Lake State Park was installed a year and a half ago. It sits on the shores of Teddy Lake, where fishermen can hope to hook a few panfish and catch an eyeful of nesting osprey and loons, Barry said.

The park charges \$60 per night and made between \$4,000 to \$5,000 from its use the first year, he said.



Typical Mongolian Yurt

"I see a lot of those adventurous young people renting them, but I also see a couple dads and a couple sons out for fishing trips," Barry said.

We're just starting with it, but I think it's just going to go crazy."

Two other state parks have installed the fixtures: There is one at the 59,000 acre Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park and at the state's largest park, Bruin Lake Campground in the Pinckney State Recreation Area in Livingston County.

Several other parks have applied for internal Department of Natural Resources grants for what State Parks resource management chief Harold Herta called the "giant marshmallows."

"It's part of our effort to diversify our overnight camping experiences," Herta said.

Porcupine Mountains has four yurts: An acrylic dome on top lets in sunlight and opportunities for stargazing at night. The structure's shape allows wind to flow around it rather than beat against flat walls, manufacturers say.

"We were really bowled over by how popular they turned out to be," said Porcupine Mountains



State Park administrator Robert Sprague.

It can be tough to find a vacancy during summer and winter, but there's room during the shoulder seasons, he said.

Wooden lattice work supports exterior vinyl canvas material. Original yurts were draped with animal skins. Cable maintains its circular shape, and a roof with rafters fits on top. A layer of insulation keeps them cool in the summer and warm in the winter, Sprague said.

While some yurts are equipped with wood stoves, Pinckney opted for propane heat, said Jon LaBossiere, Pinckney State Recreation Area manager.



Some Yurts feature full furnishings

It comes with a hand pump for water and a box toilet, and a fire ring, grill and picnic table for outside dining.

That yurt sits on Half Moon Lake, one in a chain of seven lakes totaling 800 acres. Weekends are tricky to book, but Pinckney accepts reservations a year in advance to accommodate demand.

Some private campgrounds also are adding yurts to their lodging options. Higgins Lake, 30 miles south of Gaylord and part of Campgrounds of America, has three measuring 20 feet across.

The yurts there are dressier than some. They boast a combination bathtub/shower, mini bar, microwave, sink, refrigerator, and king- and queen-sized beds.

They incorporate motifs such as "fisherman's wharf" and "pirate," and cost \$109-\$119 per night. "What's cool about these yurts is they're round, which makes you have more floor space," said camp owner Wynn Taylor