

Getting Around To Crystal Lake. Thanks to Archibald Jones

All manner of “highways” and “byways” point travellers to Northwest Lower Michigan. Several pass through Benzie County and meander around Crystal Lake, the ninth largest inland lake in Michigan (*). Segments of historical “scenic highways” are recognized as “Michigan Heritage Routes” and designated as “Pure Michigan Byways” that are scenic, recreational, or historic routes that are representative of Michigan’s natural and cultural heritage.

M-22 runs 114.45 mi from just north of Manistee to Traverse City, MI, as part of the Lake Michigan Circle Tour. It passes through Frankfort and winds around the NW shore of Crystal Lake, on through Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, and around the Leelanau Peninsula. U.S. 31 runs 1,280 mi from Alabama, through TN, KY, and IN, and 365 mi across the length of lower MI. Once known as the “West Michigan Pike”, it is also part of the Lake Michigan Circle Tour. Continuing north to the Straits of Mackinac joining Interstate 75 at the Mackinac bridge, it passes through Benzonia and Beulah at the east end of Crystal Lake. M-115 runs northwest 96.5 mi from Clare, MI at U.S. 127 and U.S. 10), and comingles briefly with US-31 south of Benzonia,. It then continues west with views of Crystal Lake along the way to its termination at M-22 next to Betsie Lake at Frankfort, where the carferry fleet crossed Lake Michigan for 90 years.

A myriad of smaller roads access Crystal Lake and crisscross its Watershed. Some perimeter roads are logically named: Lake Street; Michigan Avenue; Old State, River, and Swamp Roads, and Crystal and South Shore (East and West) Drives. Others have picturesque names, like Boekeloo, Onkeonwe, Michibou, Mollineaux, and Spittlebug.

Early travelers in Michigan traversed the immense Great Lakes, around numerous inland lakes, over swift rivers, through pine forests, and wetlands. New harbors of refuge spawned an infrastructure of inland roads, canals, and railroads.

Local roads circumnavigating the 21-mile perimeter of Crystal Lake were made possible by Archibald Jones, President of the Benzie County River Improvement Company, who attempted to build a canal from the Lake to nearby Frankfort in 1873. An unexpected storm washed out a temporary dam and the Lake level dropped abruptly by 20 ft exposing 21-miles of new beach. Prior to this epochal event, the Lake waters lapped at the foot of the hills surrounding it, and, for the greater part of its circumference, one could not walk dry shod between the Lake and the overhanging trees.

With the Lake lowered, sufficient land was created for construction of roads along the beach. using gravel and corduroy (sand-filled logs) to cover soft sand and sinkholes. The evolution of roads proceeded as the motoring public commenced to access the resorts of northern Michigan described in early vacation guide books. Without Archibald Jones and his glorious dreams of a canal, there would have been just high ridges with scraggy pine, mostly poor soils, peat swamps, and no beach around Crystal Lake! Advent of telegraph and telephone would have been delayed; the railroad line would have been located elsewhere; the perimeter roads would have been forced to follow the ridge tops rather than skirting the lake shore; the Village of Beulah would still be a swamp; 1,100 cottage would be underwater; and swimmers and boaters would have had to walk down the hills to the Lake!

References:

1. Michigan Highways, Scenic Heritage Routes, <http://www.michiganhighways.org/listings/M-022.html>
2. M-22, US-31, & M-115:
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M-22_\(Michigan_highway\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M-22_(Michigan_highway))
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._Route_31_in_Michigan
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M-115_\(Michigan_highway\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M-115_(Michigan_highway))
3. Benzie County Road Directory, 01 Nov 2012.
http://www.benzieco.net/PDF/Equalization/road_dirs/Roads_Benzie_County.pdf
4. Byron, M. Christine, and Wilson, Thomas R., Vintage Views Along Scenic M-22 including Sleeping Bear Dunes, 2015, 248 pp. ISBN 978-0-9962173-0-9; Byron, M. Christine, and Wilson, Thomas R., Vintage Views Along the West Michigan Pike: From Sand Trails to US-31, Arbutus Press, Traverse City, MI, 2011, 246pp. ISBN 978-1-933926308). <http://vintageviewspress.com/>

[(*) The Crystal Lake Watershed is relatively small (43.97 sq mi, 28,145 A) with 35% of its area comprised of Crystal Lake (15.40 sq mi 9,854 A). The Lake is like a large “bathtub” still perched 23 ft (formerly 38 ft) above nearby Lake Michigan. It is surrounded by high-ridged hills twice as high as the Lake is deep (165 ft). Its 21-mi beach was a former littoral zone completely submerged prior to the abrupt lowering of the Lake by 20 ft in 1873. It rests like a sapphire ring upon the first knuckle of the little finger on the left-hand mitten (palm down) depicting the Lower Peninsula of Michigan.]



