

# Back in the day

## Road trip revival

IN 1947, WITH WAR BEHIND THEM, AMERICANS WERE READY TO ROLL.

Andrea Zani

Summer vacation season is upon us, a time for packing up the SUV for a family getaway or getting a few good friends together for a fun and relaxing road trip. State parks are popular destinations as are other outdoor activity spots, waterparks, festivals, music events and all sorts of vacation resorts. Just getting away from it all, if only for a few days, is what matters.

And so it has been forever, it may seem — or at least since the advent of the automobile. A look back at a historic issue of the “Wisconsin Conservation Bulletin” tells us as much.

“Rediscovery of Vacation Attractions,” by C.L. Coon, appeared in the July 1947 issue of the bulletin from the Wisconsin Conservation Department (predecessor of the DNR). Coon, who was supervisor of publications and exhibits those 70 years ago, tells of “various Midwest outdoor and travel shows” that offered a “glimpse of what the 1947 tourist and outdoor sports conditions would be like.”

He also paints a vivid picture of vacationing in the immediate post-World War II era, when Americans once again could indulge their wanderlust after years under the clouds of war. And he sings the praises of “Wonderful Wisconsin,” where summer attractions “still continued to rank high among vacation objectives.”

Here are excerpts from Coon’s report.

### A glorious summer

*The wandering tourist is on the move again. He has thrown off the shackles of the long “winter up to summer” season. Along Wisconsin highways, railways and airways thousands of vacation-minded people are wandering into the state, rediscovering old haunts, finding new beauty and settling*

*down at comfortable resorts that provide relaxation and opportunity for healthful outdoor exercise.*

*It might be well said that 1947 will be the year of the rediscovery of America. Countless vacationers will learn anew that the greatness of their country can be measured not only in terms of mammoth industry and military effort but equally in terms of natural grandeur and picturesque beauty.*

*For the traveler in Wisconsin, the season ahead should indeed be a “glorious summer.” From the vacationer’s viewpoint, the prospects for 1947 are as bright as the years starting in 1941 were dark and dreary. During the long war period, travel in the country was largely a matter of necessity and the troop train was one of its primary symbols. Hotels were converted into barracks and rest resorts set aside for uniformed men. These symbols are now fast fading from memory.*

*As vacationers proceed to the destination of their choice, traveling conditions will be more adequate and more pleasant than any time during the past half dozen years. While postwar construction on a grand scale still lies in the future, the highways and other facilities along the route are in good shape — still the best in this world.*

*This year, if all predictions are not mistaken, the volume will be far greater than that registered in the years immediately before the war, for Americans have their cash in hand and are determined to satisfy their appetites for travel. The open-handed American traveler is bound to go somewhere and wherever he goes he intends to have a good time. Such is his spirit and it has made him an inveterate traveler — a sort of person who refuses to stay put when new and old horizons beckon.*

*For the first time since the war, passports to Europe will be granted to tourists bent on pleasure. Even though the bars are down,*

*travel officials forecast only a limited tourist trade to Europe this year. There are still too many obstacles in the way. The big shortage is still housing and food on land, and transportation space over land and water. Also the prices are still a long ways from the all-expense trips that sold before the war for as low as \$350.*

*With tourist travel still being made difficult to faraway places, Wisconsin resort owners will benefit. With materials and labor more plentiful this year, many Wisconsin resorts have been improved and enlarged. Many are building new cottages with housekeeping arrangements, installing new furniture and making investments in boats and motors.*

*Although the big vacation appeal is still fishing — golf, horseback riding, swimming, hiking, canoeing and just plain resting will be stressed this year. July and August are still the most popular months and most resorts will stay open through September, some into November, and all will be making a strong bid for the late vacation business.*

*All in all, Wisconsin still is considered the state of enthralling vacation contrasts — thousands of crystal clear lakes and exciting fishing streams and vast areas of wild timberland; a vacationland where in summer it is possible to choose between the pleasantly warm climate and the pleasantly cool, between the rugged hill country and lake shore, between the interesting big cities and the wilderness areas, between the fashionable resort and the lakeside cabin.*

*By every forecast, the urge to rediscover the peacetime beauty and favor of Wonderful Wisconsin will be irresistible among thousands of Midwesterners. ❧*

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The Northern Highland American Legion State Forest has long been home to summer resorts, including this one on White Birch Lake in Vilas County, pictured in 1943.