

Travel

Alsace offers the best of two cultures. K3

SOUTHWESTERN OHIO

Sweet dreams on the Great Miami



Float Troy has 10 floating tents anchored on the Great Miami River about a mile north of downtown Troy, visible in the background. Photographs by Susan Glaser, The Plain Dealer

Susan Glaser sglaser@cleveland.com

TROY — I pulled my paddle through the water and headed toward the bright orange object floating up ahead.

I've hiked to hotels, biked to inns, but this was the first time I'd traveled by raft to my overnight accommodation.

My destination for the evening: one of 10 floating tents, anchored along a quiet stretch of the Great Miami River in Troy, about 20 miles north of Dayton.

Honestly, I was a bit apprehensive about this adventure, given that I'm not much of a camper: How well would I sleep on the water? Were these tents comfortable?

And, perhaps most important, what if I had to use the bathroom in the middle of the night?

I needn't have worried. The tent was surprisingly cushy, I slept unexpectedly well and — spoiler alert — I didn't need to use the bathroom in the middle of the night.

But I would have been OK if I did.

A UNIQUE STAY IN SOUTHWEST OHIO

Matt Clifton, who coordinates the Float Troy program for the city, said Troy is the only place in the world where travelers can spend the night in a floating tent.

The inflatable tents are made by a local company, SmithFly, which also makes rafts and other fishing equipment.



The tents can sleep up to four, though two or three would be more comfortable.

Purchased by the city several years ago with grant money from a local foundation, the tents were used first by students in a University of Dayton environmental program. They're part of a broader effort to improve access to the Great Miami River, which runs 160 miles through Southwest Ohio before joining with the Ohio River near Cincinnati.

"Florida has beaches, some states have mountains. We have rivers," said Stan Kegley, project manager with the city of Troy.

The public tourism initiative was launched last year, but on a small scale because of the coronavirus pandemic.

This year, the floating tents are proving to be a major draw, attracting media attention and visitors from throughout the region and beyond.

"We thought it would really be a big hit," said Kegley. "As far as we know we're the only ones in the world doing it."

Joining me on the river during my one-night stay last month: a pair of sisters, ages 20 and 17, from Alliance; two 70-something friends from Columbus and Springfield; and a family from nearby Sidney.

The tents are spread over a wide stretch of river, perhaps 200 feet across. They're tethered to the riverbed, as well as to each other, spaced about 25 feet apart.

Located about a mile north of downtown, the tent village is part of the city's Treasure Island Park, which also has a small amphitheater, multi-purpose trails and boat launch area.

It's not a particularly remote location. I could hear the low hum of traffic from nearby Interstate 75, and a siren disturbed the peace as I was getting ready for bed.

I could also hear crickets and frogs and the wind rustling outside.

There are picnic tables and grills in the park, if you want to bring your own food, although my husband and I traveled into town for our meals. There's a highly regarded restaurant, Smith's Boathouse, inside the park's historic boathouse. Unfortunately, it was closed on the day of our visit, a recent Sunday.

SEE SOUTHWESTERN OHIO, K2

Floating tents in Troy offer a relaxing overnight stay on the water. And don't worry about needing to use the bathroom.

OHIO EVENTS

Full circle: Three-day celebration to mark John Glenn Centennial

Cambridge and New Concord are planning a range of activities to honor their hometown hero.

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NEW CONCORD, OHIO — Don Thomas remembers looking out the window of his first-grade classroom at Independence Primary School in February 1962, hoping to catch a glimpse of John Glenn orbiting the Earth.

"I remember the whole morning I wasn't looking at the teacher, I was looking out the window," said Thomas, now 66.

He didn't realize at the time that the orbit of Friendship 7 was nowhere near northern Ohio, nor could it be seen during the day.

The mission, nevertheless, made quite an impression on a young Thomas, who

remembers hearing Glenn talk about seeing the sunrise from space. "I was hooked," said Thomas, now a retired NASA astronaut who lives in Maryland. "I remember thinking, 'I want to do that.'"

Thomas gets the chance to repay the favor to the late Glenn, who is being feted this month in his hometowns of Cambridge and New Concord, about two hours south of Cleveland. The occasion: What would have been Glenn's 100th birthday on July 18, 1921.

Glenn — veteran, pilot, astronaut, senator, public servant — died in 2016, but his memory lives on in the region that he called home during his first decades.

Thomas will serve as grand marshal for the Friendship 7-Mile Parade, the centerpiece of a three-day event, running Friday through July 18, to honor and celebrate the lives of John and Annie Glenn, his long-time spouse, who passed away last year.

Other events include speakers, book signings, pop-bottle rocket launches and other children's activities, concerts, films,

biplane rides and more.

"The whole weekend is geared toward family fun," said Debbie Robinson, executive director of the Cambridge/Guernsey County Visitors and Convention Bureau.

Saturday's parade will run along U.S. 40 (the National Road) between Cambridge and New Concord and should hearken back to 1962, when thousands gathered in the streets to welcome Glenn home after his space flight.

"It was quite an exciting time," she said. "We hope to re-create some of that."

Born in Cambridge, Glenn moved with his family to nearby New Concord when he was a toddler. He and his future wife, the former Annie Castor, met while they were children. They both attended New Concord's Muskingum College (now university).

Glenn's childhood home in New Concord was turned into a museum in 2002, and will be open to the public during the weekend celebration.

SEE HOMETOWN HERO, K4



Former astronaut Don Thomas, shown at far right with crewmates on a 1995 shuttle mission, will be the grand marshal of this month's Friendship 7-Mile Parade honoring the 100th anniversary of John Glenn's birth. Chris O'Meara, Associated Press

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Susan Glaser, *The Plain Dealer*



Steven Brunot, the author's husband, navigates one of the rubber rafts used to reach the floating tents. Susan Glaser, *The Plain Dealer*

Sweet dreams on the Great Miami

Continues from K1

The park also has a small bathhouse, with two toilets and two sinks, open all night. There is no shower, though Clifton said he is hoping to add one next year.

The 75-mile Great Miami River Trail multi-use path runs alongside the park, a popular destination for cyclists.

The primary mode of transportation on this trip, however, wasn't intended to be two wheels, but two paddles, as well as a 10-foot-long rubber raft.

FIRST, SOME INSTRUCTIONS

Clifton went over a few instructions when we arrived, showing us how to connect our raft to our tent using carabiner clips. Once attached, it was relatively easy to maneuver from raft to tent.

"If you fall in, just stand up," he said. "The river is only about 3 feet deep."

Clifton was initially concerned about the wind during our visit, with gusts predicted as high as 35 mph. He recommended against using one of three floating fire pits.

"The worst thing that might happen is that the wind will blow you closer together," he said. "The tents might bump into one another."

The wind died down by nightfall, however, and our tents stayed where they were supposed to.

We checked in just after 5 p.m., then moved some of our stuff to the tent, about a five-minute paddle from shore.

These rafts — also made by SmithFly — were simple to maneuver, and easily held a couple of sleeping bags, pillows, a small overnight bag, lantern and a complimentary drybag provided by Float Troy.

After dropping off our gear, we set out to explore the river, first heading south toward downtown. Clifton cautioned us about a low-head dam about a mile and a half away. "You will not just stumble upon it," he said. "You will see it."

But we got only about half that far, paddling against the wind the whole time.

The day was hot and humid, so I asked Clifton if the river water was clean enough to swim in. He assured me that it was, although the breeze kept me just cool enough and I didn't get wet above my legs.

After dinner downtown, my husband and I headed back to camp, used the restroom, then paddled back to Tent 6, with lights from the park guiding the way.

SmithFly describes its shoal tent as a raft with a tent top. The base doubles as an extra-firm air mattress and was surprisingly comfortable. It felt like a 1970s-era waterbed every time I rolled over, gently bobbing on the water.

I didn't have any trouble falling asleep, though the horns from numerous passing trains in town woke me up way too early.

So I rose with the sun, paddled to shore and used the restroom.

THE BATHROOM ISSUE

I asked Clifton how many campers just went to the bathroom in the river. He told me he was not in the habit of asking overnight guests that question.

Yet the bathroom issue was clearly top of mind for many of the people I talked to.

Both before and after my stay, I had numerous people — women, mostly — ask me about using the bathroom in the middle of the night.

Fellow campers Reatha Collinsworth and Cindy Gibbons told me they had a friend who declined an invitation to join them on the water because of concerns she would need to paddle to shore in the middle of the night.

Indeed, Collinsworth said, she stopped drinking water



Troy features a lovely downtown with numerous restaurants and shops and an architecturally striking courthouse. Susan Glaser, *The Plain Dealer*

If you go: Float Troy

Where: Troy is the seat of Miami County, about 225 miles southwest of Cleveland, just north of where interstates 70 and 75 intersect.

Cost: A one-night stay is \$85 and includes use of a kayak or raft. The 8-foot-by-8-foot tents sleep up to four, although two or three occupants would be more comfortable.

Availability: The tents rent from late June through early September, with limited dates open this summer. Information: float-troy.com

Also in Troy: Troy, population about 25,000, has one of the loveliest small downtowns I've seen in Ohio, with numerous restaurants, shops and a gorgeous county courthouse. Troy Main Street puts on a biannual public art project, Sculptures on the Square, which this year features 22 sculptures reflecting the theme "Taking Flight." The show runs through Oct. 4. Information: troymainstreet.org

Where we ate: We enjoyed local beer and upscale bar food at Moeller Brew Barn, located in a former church at 214 W. Main St. For a late breakfast/lunch, we hit K's Hamburger Shop, 117 E. Main St., a Troy mainstay since 1935. A hamburger here is \$3; a milkshake, \$3.05.

More information: homegrowngreat.com

early in the evening to avert the problem. As for why the two signed up for the adventure, Gibbons said, "It was something different. We like doing different things."

I, too, tried not to drink too much in advance, which was a bit of a challenge given the heat of the day and because I had dinner at a brewery.

Even so, it all turned out OK.

After using the park restroom shortly after sunrise, my husband and I headed out on our raft again, this time traveling north, where we had a serene stretch of the river all to ourselves.

As the midmorning sun rose overhead, we turned around and made our way back to our tent before the 10 a.m. checkout time. We packed up our gear and paddled slowly back to shore.

TROY ATTRACTIONS

WACO Air Museum offers a look at early days of flight

Susan Glaser sglaser@cleveland.com

TROY — Dayton gets all the credit as the birthplace of aviation, but the industry's early influencers extended well beyond city borders into several Southwest Ohio communities.

In Troy, 20 miles north of Dayton, the WACO Aircraft Co. was once the largest producer of civil aircraft in the world. A history museum in town celebrates the company and its aircraft, with several early planes and other artifacts that tell the story of WACO (rhymes with "taco").

Originally called the Weaver Aircraft Co., the business started in Lorain, moved to Medina and finally landed in Troy in 1923, in part to be near Orville Wright and other early innovators.

The WACO museum, including a working airfield, is part of the National Aviation Heritage Area, a National Park Service corridor that includes 10 destinations across five counties, from Wapakoneta to Dayton to Urbana (see www.visitnaha.com).

In its 28 years in business, WACO produced a variety of aircraft, from the heavy and hard-to-fly "Cootie," WACO's first plane, produced in 1919, to its most popular model, the WACO 10, with more than 1,200 sold between 1927 and 1931.

"The 10 was the best-selling plane. It put them on the map," said Gretchen Hawk, executive director of the museum.

Among the aircraft on display here: a "Cootie" replica, a Model 9 and a restored 1929 WACO Taperwing owned by famed stunt pilot Joe Mackey.

During World War II, WACO won the military contract to design and produce engine-less gliders, which were used to transport troops behind enemy lines.

"They served the war well, but they weren't always the safest thing," said Hawk. "You were pretty much defenseless."

Indeed, the exhibit on gliders includes this gem from veteran war correspondent Walter Cronkite, who was transported in a WACO glider during the 1944 invasion of Holland: "I'll tell you straight out: If you've got to go into combat, don't go by glider. Walk, crawl, swim, parachute, float — anything. But don't go by glider!"

About 1,100 gliders were made in Troy, with thousands more produced elsewhere.

Numerous gliders hadn't been shipped by the end of the war, so they were sold in the community for \$50. The people who bought them didn't want the planes — they wanted the shipping crates.

"Wood was at a real premium," said Hawk. Today, she said, there are sheds, chicken coops and other structures around town made from WACO wood crates.

The company shut down in 1947, after the war, and the factory was eventually purchased by the Goodrich Corp. Today, Collins Aerospace manufactures aerospace wheels, brakes and other parts in Troy. "It's cool the property is still used to produce aircraft," said Hawk.

The museum is located about a mile from the original company site, which is still in use.

Years ago, an unrelated company that calls itself the WACO Aircraft Corp. started making a contemporary version of the WACO biplane from its facility in Battle Creek, Michigan. One of those planes, the Sunny, was donated to the museum several years ago and is available for public rides.

The plane holds two passengers, plus the pilot. Cost for a 30-minute ride for two is \$350, and must be booked in advance. A shorter, 10- to 12-minute ride is available for \$200 on select weekends; see wacoairmuseum.org/sunny.

The Sunny will travel to Cambridge Municipal Airport on July 17, as part of the John Glenn Centennial celebration. Glenn's first flight, in 1929 at age 8, was in a WACO plane.

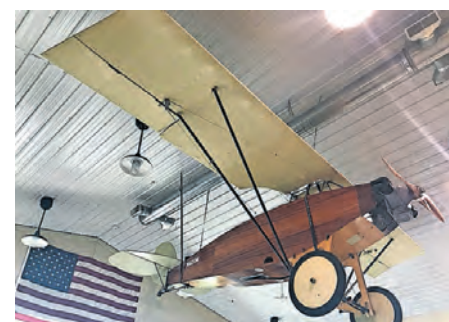
If you go: WACO Air Museum, Troy

Location: 1865 South County Road 25A, just south of downtown Troy

Hours: 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday through Friday, noon-5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

Admission: \$6 adult, \$5 military, \$3 student

More information: wacoairmuseum.org



A re-created "Cootie" hangs at the WACO Air Museum. Susan Glaser, *The Plain Dealer*