

1,238 Miles With The Top Down

by John Renaud

Back in June, Paul Sandie, a fellow MGB owner, and I were kayaking in Lake Huron 6 miles north of Oscoda. He reminded me that the Great Lakes Sea Kayak Symposium was coming up next month. We both decided to camp there. So I started getting the MGB V8 ready for the trip.

I revised the front suspension to gain more front ground clearance. The previous height was ideal for "The Tail of the Dragon" in Tennessee but not for any rough road excursions. The Symposium takes place in Grand Marais in

Michigan's Upper Peninsula. I got all my spare parts and camping gear ready. I also changed back to a longer travel shift lever and I rejettted the carburetor from 0.086 to 0.083 to lean it a bit.

Thursday July 10, 2003

I left Dearborn with the top down and headed for our cottage on Lake Huron. My wife, Isabelle, was already there with my daughter and her family. Being retired allows for a lot of flexibility! It was overcast but I was determined to drive all the way with the top down. I drove in and out of light showers. I'd check the tonneau cover over the passenger seat. It was not wet as long as I was driving 70 mph so I kept going. I stopped at Freeway Fritz just past Birch Run for Shell gas and a chicken lunch. I was about 3 miles from our cottage when it poured. I kept driving and pulled into the garage at the cottage top still down! On Saturday, I went with my family to Oscoda to watch the end of an Au Sable River canoe race. There is another race later in the season — the biggest in North America with a \$50,000 first place prize.

I repacked the MGB V8 for the rest of the G.L.S.K.S. trip. The tonneau was bulging. The passenger side of the B was filled with my tent, sleeping bag, cot, etc. I checked the engine and added 1/2 quart of Mobil 1 20W50.

Wednesday July 16, 2003

I left the cottage at 8:30 am and took a leisurely drive up Michigan's east coast on US 23. I was in Mackinaw City about noon. I drove around the shore line in town. I saw a Morgan- also top down and waved to the couple. It was a slow trip over the Mackinaw Bridge due to some construction but the view was excellent. I had lunch in a restaurant in St. Ignace. Then, I headed west along the north shore of Lake Michigan. The drive was beautiful. Sand dunes stretched for miles and the sun glistened on the water. The sky had just cleared up before I got to Mackinaw City. Before that, the trip was heavily overcast. I kept my speed down to 55-65 mph along the shore line to enjoy the scenery. Then, I turned north to Grand Marais and Woodland Park Township Campground. My campsite was about 600 feet from Lake Superior on a 50 foot high bluff. From the bluff it was about 300-400 sandy feet to the water. The water temperature was in the low 40's. To participate in the Symposium, you were required to have a wet or dry suit to take your kayak out in Lake Superior. Being a warm weather kayaker, I didn't have a wet suit and being in the MGB I did not bring my Perception Corona kayak with me. As this was my first time to the Symposium, I just planned to take in as many lectures off water that I could and I was also looking for another

kayak more suited to the waters of Lake Huron. Well, that evening I caught up with Paul. He was camped about 600 feet away from my site right on the bluff. We had a good fish dinner that night at one of the two local pubs.

Thursday July 17, 2003

I woke up early Thursday morning. I walked into town. The town is about 3 blocks long at the foot of the bay. I found out that restaurants were close to nonexistent in Grand Marais. I found one called "Curiosity Corner" and it was. They had a grill at the back. This guy was making coffee. He looked very unruly, messy hair and dirty T-shirt. But, I was desperate so I ordered coffee and a Sausage and egg muffin. What I got was a bacon and egg muffin and I was the only customer in the place. I got it down hoping to do better tomorrow!

I walked down to the harbor. They were conducting certification tests for the instructors. They have different levels of certification for which they apply. A few were able to make it to the next certification level but not many.

I walked through the campground and saw a lot of campers with Nigel Dennis kayaks, a brand in which I was very interested. I really liked the Romany model. All the Romany owners were very positive about their kayaks. I decided that by spring I would have a Romany. I found out Nigel Dennis was one of the lecturers at the Symposium. Paul pointed him out to me. His kayak company is in the northern part of Wales in the UK. He was the first person to circumnavigate the UK in a kayak. Having the only MGB at the small town of Grand Marais, it was not long before our paths crossed. I talked kayaks with him a couple times. I offered to let him drive the MGB but he inferred that the steering wheel was on the wrong side.

At noon I headed for Munising to check out the harbor. That is where the "Pictured Rocks" boat tours start. After a speedy trip, I was about 3 miles out of Munising and started having front end noise. At first I thought it might be the big truck in front of me. I pulled over and checked around the engine. I thought it might be the mechanical fan. I pulled back on the road. More noise! I pulled into a restaurant parking lot, jacked up the left front of the B. The wheel nuts were loose. I had changed my wheels from Rostyles to alloy LE wheels just before the Tennessee trip.. I had the wrong size 13/16 socket as the LE nuts were 15/16. I tightened the wheel with an open end wrench as best I could. I drove down the shoulder of the road with the wheel still making noise. I got to a lumber yard "41 Lumber" and went in to buy a socket. They did not have that size. But, the guy at the counter said "Go out in back and see if one of the workers has that size and tighten your wheel." They did!

It was a 15/16 inch with a 2 foot long 5/8 inch drive. It weighed a ton! Two more wheel nuts were slightly loose on the other wheels.. **>Recommendation: Check the wheel nuts every 2,500-3,000 miles.<** I went into Munising to the Napa dealer and was lucky to pick up the correct socket for ONLY \$12.00. I had lunch overlooking the harbor at the "Navigator Inn", then went back to Grand Marais. I drove

around town and found a nice Diner restaurant on a back street in which to have breakfast tomorrow.

In the evening, Paul and I were walking around the campground and I met a vendor. He had a Romany kayak equipped just like I wanted. I got his address. We caught up with a bunch of the instructors down on the beach at a huge bonfire. We talked MG's and kayaks into the cool evening.

The temperature dropped into the low 40's during the night. The tent was really chilly! I had run my trouble light into the tent and hung it on my metal framed chair. The 70 watt bulb was my tent heat source!

Friday July 18, 2003

We were lucky and today the temp got back to 70 degrees. I got up with the sun and this time, 50 degrees and the top still down, I drove to the Diner. Breakfast was much better today!

Paul and I visited the vendor building to see the latest kayaks. They also have a hands on demonstration at the harbor on Saturday morning. We saw the Romany vendor and I made arrangements to go to his shop Saturday morning to check out the kayak. He had a Romany with him and he let me test it out in the harbor. It handled perfectly.

Paul went on an 18 mile kayak trip along the Pictured Rocks with about 85 other kayakers. The US Coast Guard was on alert for all the kayakers running around this area.

That evening, a group of us had dinner at the other bar in town. Then, we caught a couple of the lectures. One was by Jon Turk who kayaked 3,000 miles across the North Pacific Rim. Another was by the US Coast Guard. There were kayakers from all over the US, Canada and the UK.

Saturday July 19, 2003

I got up early, took down the tent, and packed the MGB-top still down! I headed for "Les Cheneaux Islands" east of St. Ignace. The weather and the scenery were excellent. I found the kayak shop. The Romany was perfect!

Except - How to get it to the cottage! Well, I bought it anyway! With the top down, I put a foam pad on the top bar of the windshield and another on the rear of the luggage rack. I tied the bow to the front bumper attachments, the center of the Romany to the R/H passenger seat belt and the stern to the luggage rack. It worked great- as long as it doesn't rain. So...I drove the MGB (13 feet long) with the Romany (16 feet long) over the Mackinaw Bridge (5 miles long and 200 feet above the Lakes). I was very concerned about the winds on the bridge but the MGB did fine! I drove through Mackinaw City again. Then, down US 23 through Rogers City, Alpena, and Harrisville to the cottage, a four hour 200 mile long trip. I put the kayak and the MGB in the cottage garage.

Sunday July 20, 2003

It poured rain. Paul took the same route home and said that he could only go 20 mph along US23 at Rogers City or his car would hydroplane.

Well, I kayaked for a few days, then, I pulled the MGB V8 out of the garage- top still down :-). I drove back to Dearborn to pay the bills and to check on the house. With all my side trips, the odometer registered 1,138 miles!

Life is good!



Jack Renaud with Romany Kayak and MGB V8



Jack Renaud in Romany Kayak on Lake Huron near Oscoda



Great Lakes Sea Kayak Convention at Grand Marais, MI in Upper Peninsula near the Pictured Rocks



MGB V8 and Romany Kayak at a roadside park between Cheboygan and Rogers City on M23