

Tales of Tahoe come to life cruising on the Dixie

By Kathryn Reed

ZEPHYR COVE – Lake Tahoe history is best delivered by one who lived it. So it was appropriate that Mark Twain greeted us as we boarded the M.S. Dixie II.

Twain's roots in the area run at least as deep as the lake itself – 1,645 feet.

This outing on Lake Tahoe is part history lesson, part outdoor adventure, and part scenic cruise.

I board the boat July 5 with two of my cousins – Dana from Arizona and Jenna from Missouri. This is the first time any of us has been on the Dixie. (This is actually the second Dixie. The platform of the first one is now a barge stored at the Tahoe Keys Marina that comes out for the fireworks.)



Heading out of Emerald Bay
aboard the M.S. Dixie II.
Photos/Kathryn Reed

We had been up to the parking lot at Vikingsholm a couple days earlier to peer down at the bay and see it from land. Now was our opportunity to view it from the lake.

Far out on the lake we are able to see a tiny strip of white on the mountainside. It turns out to be Eagle Falls, which is right above Vikingsholm.

The highlight for many on these trips is seeing Vikingsholm as well as the teahouse on top of Fannette Island. (The castle is open during the summer for tours.)

Between "Mark Twain" (aka MacEvoy Lane) and the recorded information coming across the loud speakers, the history of Lake Tahoe starting with the Washoe people unfolds.

The problem, though, with sitting outside on the bow with the wind coming at us is that the voices are a bit muffled and we miss much of what is being said.

Still, we learn how the first road to Emerald Bay opened in 1913, that a glacier formed the bay, the scar to the left at the end of the bay is from a 1955 600-foot avalanche that closed the road for one year.

More recent, we are told 15 eagles wintered at the mouth of the bay – which is called Eagle Point – and they left three weeks ago.

It's crowded on this holiday weekend. All the cruises were expected to sell-out during the long weekend. Arrive early because we had a hard time finding a seat outside. People had thought it a good idea to reserve their chair and then leave. Not so fast said some of the other passengers.

The Dixie has two interior floors, one of which has a small area where you can see through to the bottom of the lake. Food and beverages are available, and there is a small souvenir shop on board.

The other paddleboat Aramark runs on the South Shore is the Tahoe Queen. It is a true paddle-wheeler because the paddle is its sole power source. The Dixie has an engine. The difference

also means the cruising times differ. The Dixie takes two hours for the Emerald Bay trip and the Queen 2½ hours.

The Dixie holds 525 people and is the largest cruising vessel on the lake, while the Queen can take on 380.

The Queen leaves from Ski Run Marina and the Dixie from Zephyr Cove.

The annual race between the boats is during Labor Day weekend.

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)