

Touring Near Toledo

Story & photos by Tracy Beard

Exercise, explore river countryside

Occasionally I find myself with a free day on the weekend. I don't want to travel far, but want a day filled with something other than the same old thing. Recently I planned a "day near Toledo" with my daughter, Brittney, and it included several stops: Gee Cee's truck stop, Rapid Rides, South Lewis County Park Pond, Mrs. Beesley's, and Bateaux Cellars. Loads of fun, good food and great wine filled the day.

Gee Cee's Truck Stop

Brittney arrived in Longview in the morning, and we began our tour around 10:30am. Heading north on Interstate-5, we decided to pick up a light lunch before starting our float trip on the Toutle River. Gee Cee's truck stop is just west of the highway near Vader. Here you'll find tasty pre-made sandwiches, chips, sodas, sweets, and more. If you have time to spare, there is a great little restaurant where you can sit down and order a meal.

We picked up a delicious turkey wrap, Ritz crackers, and a package of salami and cheese. Lemon cupcakes rounded out the meal, and due to a shortage of time, we shared lunch in the car.

Rapid Rides

Rapid Rides, located at 8011 Spirit Lake Highway in Toutle, offers white water rafting from mid-April to late May and tubing from May through early September. James Fratello started Rapid Rides six years ago. His cousin Pete assists as a Sunday guide, his sister Jill and James's girlfriend, Dana, help run the business. Currently, Rapid Rides is open Friday through Sunday, but James hopes to also be open weekdays next summer. Riverfront tent camping is available for six small groups.

Adventurers can rent a single tube, inflatable kayak, or a tube for four. You can ride the rapids alone or hire James or Pete to float with you as a guide. One of the best things about Rapid Rides is the shuttle at the end of the more than four-mile trip — no paddling upriver.

Brittney paddled with Pete, and I rode with James. Since I spent most of my time taking pictures, James got a serious workout navigating the rapids alone. We



tubed the north fork of the Toutle River. The river was moving at a good pace, and we enjoyed the one- and two-level rapids along the way. There was nothing too scary, but enough to get a little wet. The terrain along the river is gorgeous, and sometimes guests can spy local wildlife — deer, beavers — and other "tubers," some wilder than others.



James and Pete constantly work to keep debris and fallen trees out of the river, but there are still obstacles to traverse along the route. Guests are required to watch a video before heading out. Life jackets are required, and helmets are encouraged. James provides this equipment and has wetsuit booties for those who want them.

Floating down the river on tubes is fun for kids and adults. The trip takes 1-1/2 – 2-1/2 hours from start to finish, allowing people enough time to enjoy the river without taking up the entire day.

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South Lewis County Park Pond

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South Lewis County Park Pond

South Lewis County Park Pond is south of Toledo off SR-505. This quiet park boasts a good-sized pond with a couple of fishing docks, picnic tables, trees, a covered group picnic area, restrooms, and a designated swimming area. The sandy beach is perfect for sunbathing, and the large grassy areas are ideal for group games and watching activities.

Mrs. Beesley's

I have passed Mrs. Beesley's, a burger stand located on the east side of I-5 near Toledo, at least a hundred times. I always thought I would one day stop and see if it's any good. Brittney and I added Mrs. Beesley's to our itinerary. After visiting South Lewis County Park Pond, we stopped and shared a deluxe bacon cheeseburger, fries, and a banana fudge shake.

The burger was juicy and delicious, and the crinkle fries were crispy and hot. But if I must rave about anything, it was the shake. It was cold and creamy with thick, decadent fudge and banana chunks. Mrs. Beesley's uses real fruit in the shakes, and the shake menu is extensive.



Bateaux Cellars

Now that we had sustenance, it was time for wine. I have been to Bateaux Cellars in Toledo before. Steve and Cheryl Padula founded Bateaux in 2009. They brought their daughter Lauren and her husband Angelo on board three years ago to assist with the business.

Steve produces all the wine. He makes the reds on site, and the whites are produced and bottled in Prosser, Washington, where he purchases grapes from Airfield Estates. He also continues to perfect his winemaking skills with advice from Marcus Miller, winemaker for Airfield Estates. Lauren distributes the wine and runs the tasting room, and Cheryl maintains customer relations.

I enjoy Steve's riesling with tropical and citrus notes and a light touch of kiwi at the finish. His rosé offers a delicate sweetness with a hint of tart raspberry and watermelon, a great sipper for a summer day. All the reds are tasty, but Brittney and I both favored the Nightcap, a fortified wine that is dry, not sweet, with a bit more body.



Bateaux is a delightful place to visit. Enjoy your wine inside by the fireplace or outside by the fire pit when it's cold. In the summer you can sip while relaxing on the cellar porch or the new shaded deck. You can bring your picnic lunch or order a charcuterie box, wine, chips, or one of Steve's margherita or pepperoni pizzas baked in their wood-fired oven.



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By Tracy Beard

PROVISIONS
ALONG THE TRAIL

Grilled Peach & Watermelon Salad for Two

- 2 balls fresh burrata cheese
- 2 4 x 4 x 1/2-inch thick squares of ripe watermelon
- 1 ripe peach
- 6 oak lettuce leaves
- 2-3 Tbl balsamic glaze – reduce balsamic to syrup or use Nonna Pia's glaze
- Smoked sea salt, to taste
- Black pepper, to taste
- 2 Tbl basil oil
- 1 tsp olive oil



Dip the peach in boiling water for 30 seconds to one minute. Peel off the skin. Cut in half, remove the pit, cut a little off the round side to flatten the surface and brush both sides with olive oil. Grill to make hash marks on each side. Cook until warm but not mushy. Place the oak leaves decoratively on the plates. Place the watermelon in the center, top with the peach and then the burrata. Drizzle with balsamic glaze and basil oil, season with salt and pepper.

Classic Gin Martini for One

- 2 1/2 ounces well-chilled gin
- Dash of dry vermouth
- One or two green olives on a toothpick
- Lemon zest twist

Add gin and vermouth to a mixing glass, fill it with ice, and stir—don't shake. Strain into a frosted martini glass and garnish with the olives and lemon.



English Pea Bruschetta for Two

- 3/4 cup fresh shelled peas
- 8 fresh mint leaves, chopped
- 8 fresh basil leaves, chiffonade (finely cut or shredded),
- 4 fresh tarragon leaves, chopped
- 3 ounces feta cheese, crumbled
- 1 teaspoon chives, chopped
- Black lava salt, season to taste
- Black pepper, season to taste
- 4 herb crostinis
- 3 Tbl extra virgin olive oil

Mix everything but the feta and crostinis in a bowl. Place 1/4 of the mix on each crostini and sprinkle 1/4 of the feta on top. Garnish with a pea shoot and serve with a delicious Washington viognier (pronounced "vee-own-yay").

